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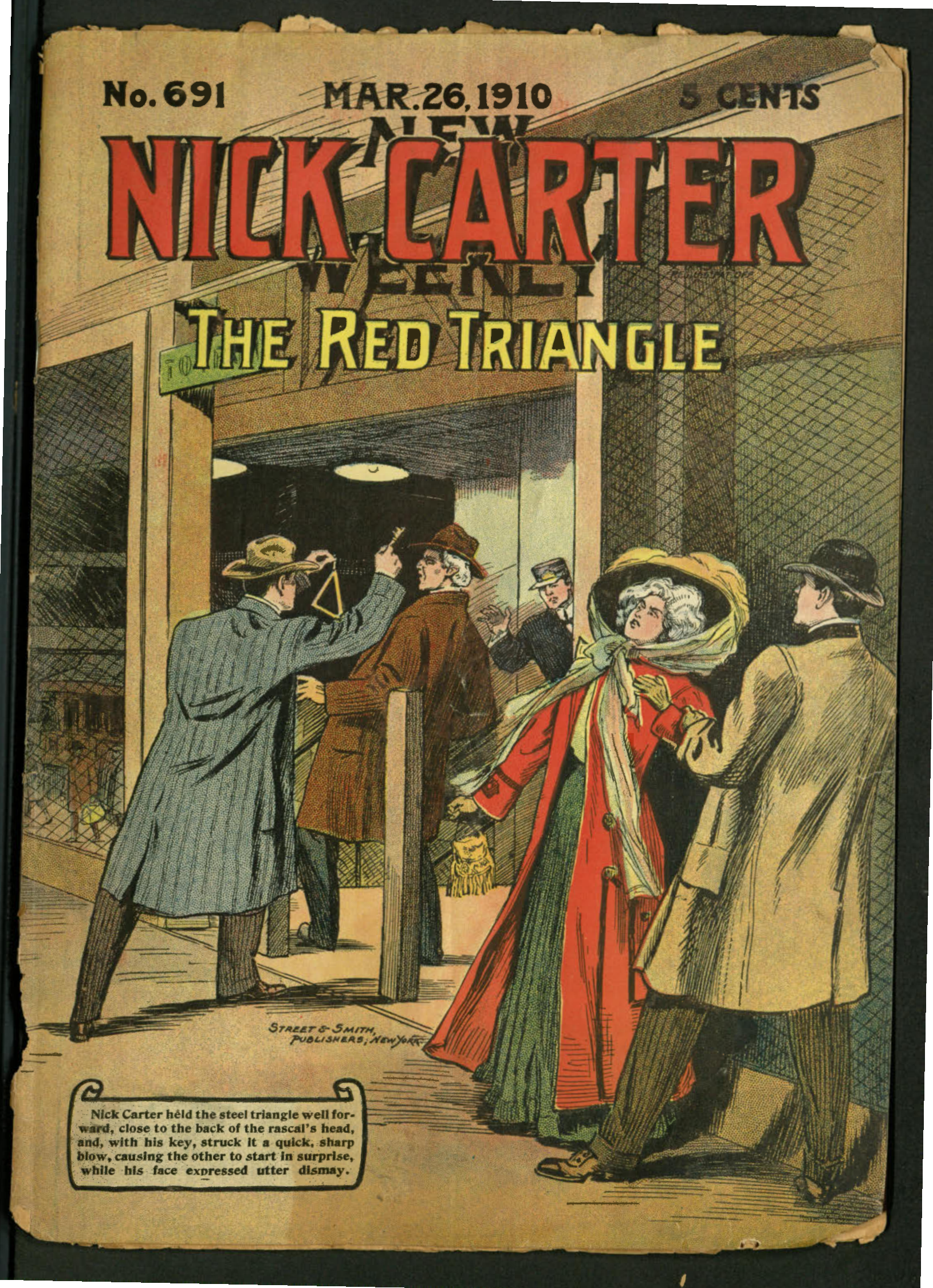
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE RED TRIANGLE



Nick Carter held the steel triangle well forward, close to the back of the rascal's head, and, with his key, struck it a quick, sharp blow, causing the other to start in surprise, while his face expressed utter dismay.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

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The Red Triangle;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S THREE-CORNERED PUZZLE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE THREAT IN A LETTER.

Nick Carter came to an abrupt halt as he was ascending the steps in front of his house.

"What's that?" he asked, pointing at some chalk marks which appeared on the top step.

"Looks to me like chalk," replied Chick, who was with him. Then he added, as if an explanation were needed: "The prank of some schoolboy, probably."

"Red chalk, at that," said the detective; and he shrugged his shoulders and passed on into the house followed by his first assistant.

Joseph gave him three letters as he entered, and he passed on into the library before he opened them; then he ran his finger under the flap and ripped the envelopes open, one after another.

A card, an oblong piece of pasteboard, fell from the last one of the envelopes he tore open, and fluttered to the floor. Chick picked it up for him and placed it in his hand with the blank side uppermost.

The detective was already reading one of the remaining letters, and he finished that and the second one before he returned to the card that had fluttered to the floor from the last of them. Chick, in the meantime, had seated himself.

Nick only glanced at the card; then he raised his eyes and looked across the room toward his assistant; but he said nothing. Instead, he left the room, passed through the front hall to the door, and out upon the steps where he had first discovered the chalk marks.

He passed on to the step below it, and turned; then he studied the chalk mark for a moment, comparing it with other marks that were upon the card he still held in his hand.

"They are identically the same," he said to himself, and he reëntered the house, telling Joseph, as he again passed through the hall, to send one of the servants to wash the marks from the front step.

He reëntered the library and crossed the room to where Chick was seated.

"Take a look at that," he said, placing the piece of pasteboard in the assistant's hand. "Tell me what you think of it now? Would you still call it the prank of a schoolboy?"

"By Jove!" said Chick, gazing at the card. "This is identically the same as the mark on the steps, isn't it?"

"Yes; save that one was made with chalk and this one with ink; and this one is not so large as the other."

"They are both the same color, anyway."

"Red. Yes."

Chick raised his eyes suddenly.

"I see," he said. "I didn't understand at first. This is the card that just now fell to the floor from one of the envelopes you opened, and that I picked up for you, isn't it?"

"It is."

"And you went outside to compare them, eh?"

"Precisely. They are exactly alike save for the two exceptions I have already made."

"It is a red triangle," said Chick, studying the card.

"That is evidently what it is meant to be, a red triangle," replied the detective, nodding. "What do you make out of it, Chick?"

"There seems to be nothing to make out of it, more than appears in plain sight." He turned it about several times in his hands, at last pausing with it in the first position. "I suppose this is meant to be the top of it," he said, "by the way, or, rather, the position, in which the letters have been drawn."

"Yes. That is evidently the top," commented the detective, looking over Chick's shoulder at the card. "Holding it so, with one side of the triangle at the bottom, the remaining two sides form a pyramid, and the letter N is at the top, with the letters C and P, respectively, at the other points."

"I don't know what they represent, do you?" asked Chick.

"Not unless they stand for Nick, Chick, and Patsy," replied the detective, smiling. "It looks to me, Chick, as if this were some new form of threatening letter." Nick smiled again, even more broadly than before. "I have received so many letters of that kind, at one time and another, that I really supposed I had run the gamut—but I guess not."

"What do you make out of these letters inside the triangle?" asked Chick, studying the card with a new interest. "Perhaps it is a threatening letter, but that isn't the way it impressed me at first."

"No? How did it impress you at first?"

"Why, as I said out there on the steps; as some boy's prank."

"Possibly it is so; only I don't think it."

"Nor I—now."

"Let's see. The letters inside the triangle, under the N, are S. G. And now we have to turn the whole thing around part way to bring the other letters that are inside upright, and that gives us I. B.; then, if we turn it again we find inside the remaining angle the letter M—or is it a W?"

"It might be either," smiled the detective, "but the fact that you are obliged to turn the carboard part way around once, in order to get the other two letters into a correct position, would suggest that it should be turned again for that one; and that would make it unquestionably an M. I think that is what it is intended for."

"But what do the letters represent?" asked Chick, still studying the card.

"You asked that same question in regard to the letters outside the triangle, Chick; and now, I should say, if my guess—which was not made seriously, but which may be correct for all that—if my first guess was correct, it is not difficult to determine what the inside letters stand for."

"Eh? What, then?"

"There are two men now in prison, Chick, under sentence of death, who might claim those double initials, and there is a woman who is not in prison——"

"You mean Madge, I suppose," the assistant interrupted; and the detective nodded.

"Well," Chick went on, "she is just as good as in prison, isn't she? She has not been able to stand trial because she was in the hospital where criminals are confined; but if that isn't a prison, what is it?"

"Oh, to be sure; it is a prison; and at last accounts Madge was there. I wonder if she is there now?"

"Eh? What?" Chick half started to his feet, reaching for the telephone, but at a motion from his chief sat down again.

"That can wait. We can find out all about her presently," said Nick.

"I confess that I hadn't thought of applying the initials to that outfit," said Chick; "but it's as sure as that you are here with me that the initials stand for them, all right. Do you think it really is that, Nick?"

"Give it up, lad," replied Nick, taking the card in his hand and looking at it again. "It might be so. Slick George and Ike Brown are now convicted murderers, and they got what was coming to them through our efforts—your, mine, and Patsy's. Madge would have been convicted also had she been tried; she will be convicted if she ever is tried."*

"She ought to be, that's dead certain."

"She will be—when she is tried. But if there is any significance at all in these triangles—the one

*See No. 690 NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "A Clue From the Past."

drawn in chalk upon the steps and this one, in red ink, on the card—the whole thing means, simply, that Madge has somehow gotten away from the hospital, that she is contemplating getting even with us for what we have done to her and her's, and lest we might never be aware of the facts otherwise, she takes this method of warning us of her intentions."

"That is just like a woman, isn't it?"

"Yes, and some men, too. This particular case makes me think of a case that happened very long ago, when Doctor Quartz and Zel used to send me warnings all the time. The fact that they did so always made the cases against them rather more interesting; but I don't give this woman credit for being as dangerous as Zel proved herself to be."

"You think, then, that it is Madge who has done this?"

"No; I can't say that I think so exactly; I think, however, that it is extremely probable, always provided that we discover, presently, that Madge has somehow escaped from the hospital."

"The telephone will tell us that."

"Presently. Presently. There is no need for haste."

"Well, there is one comfort, anyway. It's a sure thing that Slick George Belden and Ike Brown haven't escaped from the death house at Sing Sing."

"No. There is no likelihood of that. Still, if Madge is at liberty, which I now strongly believe to be the case, she is one to reckon with."

"There is still another letter inside that triangle, Nick, that we haven't mentioned yet. What do you suppose the letter H, in the very centre of it, means?"

"Well, it might mean heaven, and it might stand for another place that is not so inviting, and if that is meant for a threat, it is doubtless to one or the other of those places to which we have been, or are intended to be, consigned."

"That was a cheeky thing, and rather a daring one, too, for Madge or anybody else, to walk up the front steps and make those chalk marks," said Chick, "particularly in the light of the card which was already on its way to you through the mail."

"Oh, I don't know. A boy might have been hired to make the marks on the steps."

"Then we ought to be able to find the boy. Probably he could tell us something about it all."

"Yes. But you haven't struck quite the crux of the matter yet, Chick."

"Haven't I?"

"Not quite. The triangle must mean something else; and what that something else is we are either expected to know—or at least it was supposed that we might know."

"But what else could it mean? I don't in the least understand."

"I was trying to recall something about a triangle; it isn't the first time I have observed a bit of cardboard marked in that manner. It has gone from me for the moment, but it has to do with something that has happened in the past. It is something about a practice of a tribe of Indians, somewhere in the world—— Oh!"

"Got it?" asked Chick, with a grin.

"Yes. I've got it now. I remember. Indians, too; only they were East Indians. Wait, Chick—or, better, follow me to the study. I know what it is now. It will interest us for a time, if nothing more. The triangle is a threat, all right, Chick, and you can bank on it that the woman, Madge, is at liberty."

CHAPTER II.

A CHAMBER OF HORRORS.

Some of the newer readers of the Nick Carter histories are, perhaps, not familiar with the interior of Nick Carter's famous study, or with the house itself, for that matter. The house we have never definitely located in these pages, for obvious reasons, but the fact that it is above Twenty-sixth Street, and below Thirty-fourth Street, on the east side of Madison Avenue, is generally known.

Concerning its general interior, we may have occasion to speak later; just now we have to do only with the study.

That is on the second floor, at the rear. It closes with a spring lock, and no one is permitted to enter it save on invitation from the detective. Naturally, Chick, Patsy, and Ida Jones, his assistants, are exceptions to this rule.

It is a large room, comfortably, if not luxuriantly, furnished. Books of reference are on the shelves, atlases and gazetteers among them; maps are in rolls, tucked away in cases for their reception; Nick's private desk, his own easy-chair, and a couch which he calls his thinking couch, are the most noticeable articles of furniture. There is a grate for an open fire whenever one is required, and the room possesses every feature which is important to the detective in the pursuit of his profession.

Two rooms connect with it, but with no other part

of the house; these are a dressing room and a file room. The former is supplied with everything that may be desirable at any time in the way of disguise for the detective or his assistants; the latter is fitted with cabinets, pigeon holes, and files for the reception of papers of all sorts and descriptions.

One of the cabinets in this last room is marked "Old Cases," and nothing that is not at least five years old goes into it. "Recent Cases," "Unfinished Cases," "Parallel Cases," "New Cases," each have a cabinet to themselves.

It was to the cabinet of old cases that Nick Carter led the way now when he and Chick passed through the study into the file room together.

He pulled out the card-index file, searched there for a moment, and, presently finding the case he wanted, he glanced through the memoranda sufficiently to refresh his memory, and then, having returned the papers to their places, he went again into the study and dropped into the easy-chair while Chick stretched himself leisurely upon the couch.

"Chick," said the detective then, "before we begin seriously to discuss this matter I want to ask you a puzzling question."

"Well, if it puzzles you I don't see why you need ask me about it," replied Chick.

"The question is, perhaps, irrelevant. Nevertheless, it is this: What, in the name of all that is amazing, do you suppose Madge Belden could know about a country that is totally unknown to more than half a dozen white men in the world, a country that I have never visited but once, and hope I may never see again, that is situated in the heart of the Himalaya Mountains, and is supposed to be almost inaccessible if not quite so, from which no white man—save myself and one other—has ever returned? Answer me that."

"Give it up," said Chick, yawning. "Is that the old case you were looking for?"

"Yes."

"What has it got to do with the triangle?"

"Everything. I have seen the red triangle before; but I saw it there."

"Among the Himalayas?"

"Yes."

"Then this must be merely a coincidence; eh? The two things couldn't possibly have any connection, could they?"

"That is the question I was asking myself when I asked you that irrelevant question, only now."

"Well, did you find the answer?"

"No."

"Maybe Madge has been there."

"She couldn't get there and get back without a flying machine. That is out of the question. Besides, Madge was born and raised in the West—of our own country. She was brought up on a ranch. She can punch cows, ride horses, shoot the stars out of the sky, throw a riata, and all that, but when it comes to fooling with the buzz saw in the shape of Upper India, I don't think that Madge—— Oh, pshaw! I don't believe that Madge has ever crossed the ocean, let alone been to India."

"I agree with you there; and so it must be coincidence."

"It's a queer one, if it is one. The red triangle. Humph!"

"What does it mean, anyhow, that red triangle, according to your East Indian friends?"

"It means—finis."

"Eh?"

"The end. Death."

"Oh! Say, that is more to the point."

"Rather—if it is borrowed from my friends—as you call them—from the Himalayas."

"Is that triangle on the card the same, in all respects, as the other one to which you have referred, Nick?"

"Practically."

"Letters, and all?"

"Well, the letters are merely explanatory of the particular incident to which the triangle refers. There, in the far East, characters are used instead of letters; but they are characters to represent persons, just as these letters are initials to represent persons."

"Outside and inside the triangle, eh?"

"Yes; just that. Those outside are marked for death; those inside are marked for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

"Aw, say!"

"I am speaking in the grandiloquent sense employed among the people where I first saw and heard about the red triangle, Chick. Has it occurred to you to ask yourself what the mere shape, comprehended by a triangle, means?"

"I can't say that it has, Nick."

"It means vibration."

"Vibra——"

"Vibration, Chick, is the law of the universe; the law of life. That mysterious country to which I have referred, is one where the laws of vibration are understood and lived up to. Vibration being the law

that governs life, is also the rule of death. Don't you see?"

"Blowed if I do!"

"Well, never mind that. We'll stick to the triangle itself, and not worry about extrinsic arguments."

"Thanks. Awfully obliged if you will. I confess that you are getting too deep down for me."

"In that far country the red triangle is the death signal. The executioner wears it, emblazoned upon his breast; the house of execution is built in the form of a triangle; a person who is condemned to die in that house receives, when he is sentenced, a triangle made of the finest steel, stained red, and attuned to the key that will strike his death note."

"That's interesting. What do they do? Cut off his head?"

"No. He is killed by vibration. He is shut up within those triangular walls, standing in the very centre of the place, just where the letter H is marked here, on this card. His feet are locked inside a pair of steel slippers that are fast to the floor; his head is encased in a skull cap of steel with a metal strap under his chin so that he cannot loosen it, and the cap is connected with the ceiling over his head by a steel rod which is immovable."

"That must be—er—what did you call it?"

"I didn't call it—but I guess it is. The executioner fastens the prisoner, as I have described it. The red triangle is suspended in front of the doomed man. When the executioner is ready to withdraw from the room he strikes the triangle, and vanishes."

"Interesting."

"Then the vibration gets in its work. Everything in that room is attuned to the key of the triangle—and everything there is capable of vibratory action. Insulated steel gongs of all sizes cover the walls and the ceiling of that awful place, and all are pitched with the same note. A mere touch against the triangle starts them. They begin to answer, the din starts, it increases. One gong after another takes it up. A perfect pandemonium of sound, all upon that one note, although at different octaves, ensues. It becomes deafening to the culprit who is fastened there so that he cannot move. It hammers upon his head with terrific force. It drives him mad. He cannot escape it. His body jerks and sways, is contorted and cramped, as if thousands of volts of electricity were passing through him. His veins swell and finally burst. Oh, it is true. When his body is taken down it is changed into a soft, pulpy mass, with barely a bone unbroken. It is true, I tell you."

"But—how in the world do they take the body down? I should think——"

"At a given moment the door of the triangular room is thrown open from the outside, by the pressure of a spring; at the same instant a huge bell in a near-by tower is struck one note which is not the same as that one in the vibratory hell. The new note clashes against the death note and destroys it. In an instant all is still again, save only the discordant murmurs that wander away, to die in the distance."

"What a horrible thing it is—if it is true. If it can be true."

"It can be, and it is true."

"And that, you mean to tell me, is what the red triangle means—to us?"

"I am afraid it does, Chick. I don't mean that I think we have any reason to fear it, or anything that can come of it, in this country. What I do mean is that I fear that one of those people has wandered away from that far country, into our world, and that Madge has somehow come into contact with him. It would be another case of Zanabayah the Terrible."

"Oh; is that the old case?"

"It is one of them."

"Well, then, I take it that the red triangle was intended as a death message, as you call it, to you, and Patsy, and me."

"That is about the size of it."

"I don't think that here, in the great city of New York, we need give ourselves any particular uneasiness about the triangular chamber of horrors; do you?"

"No. I was thinking of the significance of the whole thing."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"We must assume—if we are to take any notice of it at all—that the letters outside the triangle refer to me, to you, and to Patsy."

"Yes."

"And that those inside the triangle refer to George A. Belden, now sentenced to death at the State prison; to Ike Brown, also under sentence of death, and to Madge, who has not yet been on trial for her crime."

"Well?"

"If we assume all that, and read the message of the triangle, it means that a method has been found to liberate the two men who are sentenced to death. Never mind what it means to us; it is enough that

it means that, and, therefore, that we must prevent it. We will turn their threat against us to a warning of what they hope to do against the law, Chick."

CHAPTER III.

MORE OF THE MYSTERIOUS TRIANGLES.

The first thing the detective attended to after his conversation with Chick was to use the telephone for the purpose of discovering the truth about the prisoners. He was very quickly assured that the two condemned prisoners at the State prison were safely in their cells in the death house.

But in the case of Madge Belden, wife of Slick George and implicated with him in the crime for which he was now under sentence of death, it was different.

There was much hesitation about giving up the information the detective asked for, but at last it was forthcoming, and the result of it all was that Madge *had* succeeded in making her escape from the hospital where she was a bedridden prisoner, and that she had been gone three weeks at the time the detective made his inquiries.

The authorities had been notified of the fact, of course, but it had been decided to keep the matter absolutely quiet, and so even Nick Carter and his household had been kept in ignorance of the fact.

The manner and method of that escape need not be commented upon here. It is sufficient for the purposes of this recital that she was at liberty—and that she was dangerous. An attendant and a doorman at the hospital had mysteriously fallen asleep, and, while they slept, Madge had made her escape. Those who were implicated, or who appeared to be, had been discharged, and that ended the matter so far as the hospital was concerned.

The mark of the red triangle on the doorstep of his house, and the card, bearing the same emblem, that came to him through the mail, strangely disturbed the detective.

The significance of the thing affected Nick more than he confessed, even to his assistant.

Not that the direct threat against himself or his household impressed him; all his life he had been accustomed to threats, and, as such, they affected him not at all. It was not the thought of any menacing danger, but the mystery behind the strange emblem and its present use.

He could not get out of his mind the idea that one of those strange people from the far East had, after all these years, found his way again to New York, and that he might have to do over again a work that he had supposed to be entirely finished.

It was the thought that in recapturing Madge and committing her again to prison, he was likely to be forced to do battle against the obscure and occult forces which the descendants of those people knew so well how to use, for they had practiced them generation after generation, century after century—and their knowledge was very great.

It was true that, as Chick had said, the affair might be merely a coincidence, but if it were so, it was a remarkable one.

The formation of the triangle was too exact; the color of it; the lettering—everything connected with its use in the present case was too exactly alike that other use that had been made of it in that far away country.

He was not surprised when another one of exactly the same kind was received in the next mail delivered at the house, nor that after that they continued to come in every mail; nor that a new one had been chalked upon his doorstep during the night that followed the finding of the first one.

"There is one strong reason why I feel it my duty to take up the hunt for Madge at once," he told his two assistants at the breakfast table the second morning after the beginning of the affair.

"I suppose you refer now to Phil Preston and his wife," said Chick, and Patsy nodded comprehendingly.

"Yes," replied the detective. "We must not forget that it was Phil's wife, Loyola, against whom Slick George felt his greatest enmity; nor that it was her brother, Jim Croydon, whom he and Ike Brown murdered—for which crime the two outlaws are now under sentence of death. Phil and his wife are in the city now, and I will call upon them to-day——"

He paused right there, for the door opened, and Joseph came into the room.

"Mr. Preston is in the reception room and would like to see you, Mr. Carter, as soon as you have finished breakfast," he announced.

Nick glanced across the table toward Chick, and remarked:

"Another case of the red triangle sent through the mail," he said. Then to Joseph: "Say to Mr. Preston that I will be with him shortly."

Both Chick and Patsy accompanied him when he went to the room where Preston was waiting, for the latter was well known to all, was a personal friend of

each of them, and was, no doubt, in graver danger because of the enmity of Madge than any of them.

He stood tall and straight, waiting for them, when they entered the reception room, for Preston was above six feet in height, was a trained athlete, and a young man of prodigious strength and remarkable science.

"Good morning, Phil; glad to see you," was the detective's greeting. "This is rather an early call, isn't it? What brings you out at this hour to see me?"

"Rather an odd thing, Nick," replied the younger man after greeting all of them. "This is a sample of it, if you will take the trouble to look inside that envelope."

He extended an envelope toward the detective as he spoke, and Nick knew, before looking, what it must contain.

Nevertheless, he accepted it, opened it, drew out the cardboard like those others that he had received, and pretended surprised when he looked upon another reproduction of the red triangle.

Neither Chick nor Patsy made any remark at all; they waited to see what course their chief intended to take.

"Well, what is it?" asked Nick, raising his head after a pretended examination of the red lines he recognized so well.

"You can search me, Nick," replied Preston. "If it were the first one that I had received, I wouldn't be here now. But it isn't. It is the fifth or sixth; I don't know. I have stopped counting them."

"You mean that all of them have come to you through the mail?" asked Nick.

"No; I don't. Loyola and I find those confounded red triangles everywhere we go."

"Really? Isn't some one of your friends trying to play a joke on you, Phil?"

"That was my first idea; it was Loyola's, too; but the thing has gone too far for that. I begin to think that it is something more serious than a joke."

"You don't say! Tell me about it. Begin at the first one, if you can."

"Why, two or three days ago—two, I think it was—when Loyola went to her sleeping room on some trivial errand—it was in the middle of the afternoon, you know—she found a real triangle made of steel and painted red, lying on the top of her dresser. She had not seen it before, but she naturally supposed that I had put it there; but when I got home and told her that I knew nothing about it, we were both rather surprised."

"Naturally."

"Well, the mail brought a letter addressed to her, and it contained nothing but a piece of cardboard marked exactly like that one. The next mail brought another one, addressed to me, and marked precisely the same; and since then we have been getting them in every mail. That is the whole story, so far as I know it."

"This, I suppose, is the last one to arrive?"

"Yes. Loyola thought I had better bring it to you and tell you all about it."

"Quite right. Have you noticed the letters that are printed here?"

"Sure."

"Have you figured out what they stand for?"

"Oh, we have figured out a lot of things, as far as that goes. I thought it was one of my old classmates at college playing some new-fangled joke on me, at first, but I have dismissed that idea."

"What do you think about it now?"

"As I said once before, I give it up. I am here to ask you what you think about it."

Nick studied the triangle for a moment, exactly as if he had never seen the like of it before; then he said:

"If I hold the card in this position, which seems to be the one intended, I read at the top, over the point of the triangle, on the outside of it, the three letters, L. C. P. Then, in the middle of the base of the angles, at the bottom, and still outside the marks, I find the letters P. P. Now, what do you make of all that, Phil?"

"Why, the letters at the top stand for Loyola Croydon Preston—and those at the bottom are my initials. Then there is a lot of letters inside, which——" he hesitated, as if reluctant to say what he had in mind.

"Well?" asked the detective, to encourage him.

"Loyola insists that the letters inside the triangle—all but the one in the centre—stand for the names of her enemies. You remember that George A. Belden was known among his outlaw friends as Slick George? The other letters would suggest Ike Brown, and Madge, wouldn't they?"

"I suppose so. But Belden and Brown are both in prison now under sentence of death; and Madge——"

"I believe that Madge has escaped from the hospital," said Preston, interrupting. "I was down there yesterday afternoon. Loyola insisted that I should go. I could not see Madge, and could obtain no information concerning her, and so I came to the conclusion that she is not there. Last night I got a doctor friend

of mine to make inquiries, and he told me that she is reported dead on the books."

"Perhaps that is true, Phil."

"Possibly it is—only I don't believe it. She has escaped, and they don't want it to be known that she has done so. That is about the size of it, according to the way I figure it up."

"And what is the consequence of all your figuring about this mysterious red triangle?"

"I don't know. I can't guess; neither can Loyola. But we are both convinced that it has something to do with that old enmity of Belden's against her and her brother, and that the several triangles have been sent to us as some sort of a warning—or, rather, as a collection of warnings."

"Where else, besides the one on the bureau and those that came through the mail, have you seen anything of this sort, Phil?" asked the detective.

"Why, there has been a red triangle, marked with chalk, on the tiled floor of the bathroom at my house. Last night, when Loyola opened a book that she had been reading, she found that her book mark had been replaced by a slip of paper bearing that extraordinary emblem, letters and all."

"Anything more?"

"This morning, when I put on my hat to come here, I found another of the same sort as the one in the book tucked in my hatband. Earlier than that, when we went to the breakfast table, we each found the same thing under our napkins."

"It is all quite remarkable, isn't it?"

"Remarkable? Say, the thing is getting on my nerves—and it has already got on my wife's nerves. Oh, you needn't think I haven't asked questions about them, for I have, but not a soul that I have questioned can give me the slightest information—and, what is more, I am convinced that each one I have questioned has told the truth about it."

CHAPTER IV.

A VICTIM OF THE TRIANGLE.

The detective thought it best to say nothing to Preston of those other warnings of the same sort that had been received at his own house. The knowledge would serve only to startle Loyola and her husband still more than they were now, and that could perform no good service.

"I think," said Nick, after a short pause, "that about he best thing that you and your wife could do, would be to get out of town. Why don't you take a trip abroad? There is nothing to prevent it, is there?"

"Don't want to; and why the blazes should I?"

"Then take your wife and go on a visit to one of your ranches in the West."

"Again why? Besides, we have just come back from the West only a month ago."

"Well, I'll tell you this much, Phil. I think that these things come from Madge, for I do know that she has escaped from the hospital. I believe that it is your duty to get Loyola out of her reach, if possible. These triangles are intended as warnings of some danger."

"Very likely. That is about the conclusion at which Loyola and I have arrived. But what is the good of running away from it?"

"I don't know that there would be any good in such a course. I suggested it merely as a thought."

"It isn't my habit—and you know that—to run away from a threat. It isn't Loyola's, either. She's got as much grit and stamina as a man."

"I am aware of that, Phil."

"Well, we'll face the music, whatever it is. But Loyola wanted you to know about it."

"I think," said Nick, "that if you have nothing particular to do just now, I'll go with you to your apartment in the Socrates and talk with Loyola. After that I will talk with the servants."

"The latter won't do any good, Nick. I have already talked with them. The Socrates is more of a family hotel than an apartment house, as you know. The corps of servants is run on about the same method as in a hotel."

"Yes. Well?"

"We have the largest and the finest apartment—they call it a suite—in the place. We are what you might call the star guests. We have a regular lot of servants to wait upon us, and they are never changed. No other servants in the house save those ever come near us. I have talked with every blooming one of them, and am not a whit the wiser for it."

"Nevertheless, I will talk with them. Come; if you are ready we will go."

Before the detective left the house he gave the following order to his assistants:

"Chick," he said, "I want you to go to the hospital. Get all the information you can about Madge from the moment she was admitted there until she disappeared. Find out all about every person who has called there to see her; whether she has written and received any letters, and—you know."

"Yes."

"Patsy, Madge has been at liberty three weeks, according to that telephone information. A lot can be accomplished in three weeks by a determined person like Madge. Get on the train and go to Sing Sing. Talk with the warden, the guards, and turnkeys—with everybody who is likely to possess any information. Find out if Belden or Brown have been approached in any manner lately, and how, and by whom. You know what's needed in the way of information. Find it out if you can. Now, Phil."

The ride to the Socrates was a short one, and the distance was soon covered.

As they passed inside from the street and walked straight toward one of the elevators, an employee of the house stepped quickly forward toward them.

"Pardon me, Mr. Preston," he said. "May I speak to you a moment?"

He drew aside, and Preston followed him. Then the employee said:

"Pardon me, sir, but I see you have a gentleman with you. I thought it my duty to tell you that Mrs. Preston telephoned to the office about fifteen minutes ago, that if any one called she was on no account to be disturbed. I thought that possibly you would like to go to your rooms first before taking any one with you."

"All right," said Preston. "Thank you. We'll go up, all the same."

He was strangely disturbed when he rejoined Nick, and repeated what the employee had said to him.

"It doesn't sound a bit like Loyola to telephone a message of that sort to the office, Nick," he said. "But we'll be there in a few seconds now. Eh, Nick?"

"Loyola was not entirely alone, was she?"

"Her maid was with her when I went out."

Nothing more was said between them. They passed along the corridor in silence after they stepped from the elevator, and presently Preston touched the electric button beside the door of the suite of rooms he occupied with his wife.

There was no answer, and, after waiting a moment, he tried the door.

It opened readily enough. The latch had not been sprung against the lock. The two men passed inside.

But already the detective sensed disaster in the air. He put forth a restraining hand and held Preston back.

"Let me go ahead," he suggested; but the remark came too late, for Preston, too, had felt the alarm of the moment, and without replying to Nick he rushed ahead through the private hall toward the living room of the apartment.

He stopped as if he had been shot the moment he passed the doorway. He uttered a low moan, and staggered; but he recovered himself instantly, and rushed on again. Nick Carter stepped quickly to his side and caught him by the arm.

For an instant they stood so, and then the detective forcibly dragged his friend backward, stepping in front of him.

"Hold yourself, old man! Hold yourself, Phil. Bite on the bullet!" he said slowly. "Back up, man! Sit down in that chair. Hold on to yourself. If ever in your life you needed to do it, it is now. Hang on! Hang on!"

He forced Preston upon a chair, where the latter buried his face in his hands; and the detective, seeing that he would remain quiet for a short time, at least, returned toward the centre of the room again.

For Loyola was there on the floor.

She was lying at full length, almost in the middle of the rug. Her hands were folded across her, just beneath the swelling of her bosom. Her gown had been arranged about her as carefully as if she were laid out in a casket. Her eyes were closed, there was the suggestion of a smile upon her lips. There was not a mark upon her anywhere that he could see to indicate the cause of death.

But she was dead. There was no denying that.

In order to satisfy himself thoroughly on that point, the detective got down on his knees beside her, and listened for the beating of her heart; but it had long since ceased to beat.

Loyola Preston, she who had been Loyola Croydon before she was married to Philip Preston, six months previously, was dead. We have said that there was nothing about her to indicate the cause of death; but there was one thing to suggest the remote cause, if not the direct one.

Upon her bosom, with one of the points of it resting beneath her chin, was the steel triangle—the red steel triangle—that Preston had described to Nick as having been found on the dresser in Loyola's sleeping room recently.

Some one had searched for and found it after Loyola was dead, and had put it there where Nick Carter now saw it.

The detective removed it from its present resting place, and forced it into one of his coat pockets. Then he glanced hastily around at Phil; but the latter was still in the position in which Nick had left him, with his face buried in his hands.

Nick reached for the button in the wall that was

used to call the servants, and pressed upon it; then he turned toward the doorway through which the maid must appear, and saw her advancing along the private hallway. He went to meet her, forcing her backward into another room.

"Your name is Sarah; I remember you," he said. "Have you seen your mistress during the last half hour or more?"

"No, sir. I have been out. I just came in—I don't think I had been inside the apartment three seconds when I heard the bell," she replied. And then, affrighted, she exclaimed: "Why, what is the matter, sir?"

"Your mistress is ill; very ill, indeed. When did you go out?"

"Immediately after Mr. Preston went out, sir. But, if Mrs. Preston is ill, I should go to her at once." There was no denying the genuine alarm expressed by the maid. She would have rushed past the detective had he not detained her.

"Wait," he said imperatively. "Why did you go out, and where did you go?"

"Mrs. Preston sent me, sir. I was sent to buy some embroidery rings for her. I could not find just what she wanted at first, and had to go quite a distance before I did so. I have been gone quite a long time, I suppose; but Mrs. Preston was perfectly well when I left her, sir. She did not complain of feeling badly."

"Had any one called before you went out?"

"No, sir. It was too early in the morning for that. Mr. and Mrs. Preston had their breakfast a full hour earlier than usual this morning."

"You left here after Mr. Preston had gone away?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long a time afterward?"

"Very soon; perhaps a quarter of an hour; possibly not so long as that."

"Do you know what time it was, actually, when you went out, Sarah?"

"Yes, sir. I looked at the clock. It was half-past seven."

"Did you leave the outer door to this apartment on the latch when you went out, so that it could be opened without the key?"

"I did, sir. I had no key with me. I did not expect to be gone more than a few minutes, and therefore sprung the latch so that I could open the door without a key. But I could not find what I wanted, and——"

"Yes. You told me that. Did you meet any person in the corridor when you went out?"

"I—I think I did pass one gentleman who got out of the elevator when it came up. I had to wait for it to come down again."

"Was that one the only person you saw on this floor?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you notice him? Can you describe him?"

"No, I think not. Only that he was tall and dark, and rather handsome—and looked like a gentleman; such a person as would be a guest of the house."

"Did you notice which way he turned when he left the elevator?"

"In this direction, sir; but I could not see if he stopped anywhere along the corridor, or continued on through it. There is only one floor above this one, sir, and the elevator returned almost at once."

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER.

"Sarah," said the detective, well understanding that he was delivering a blow to the maid, against whom he had not the slightest suspicion, even of the most remote sort of connivance, "your mistress is dead. Control yourself now. Don't make a fuss. Keep your wits about you, and try to help me."

"Yes, sir; yes, sir; I'll try. But, oh, it is awful. What——"

"Never mind that just now. I want you to return to your own room at the other end of the apartment, and remain there till I call you. Will you do that? I won't keep you waiting very long."

"Yes, sir. I'll try. But—won't you tell me how it happened, sir?"

"I can't tell you now, Sarah, for the reason that I do not know myself. Mr. Preston is in there, and I must return to him at once."

"Yes, sir."

When Nick returned to the living room of the apartment, he found that Preston had not altered his position; but now the detective touched him on the shoulder, and roused him.

Nick was startled by the appearance of the face that was raised to his.

During those few moments Preston had become a changed man. His face was drawn and haggard, and it was years and years older; and it was whiter than the face of the corpse on the floor.

He rose slowly to his feet when Nick touched him, and stood staring.

"It's true, isn't it, Nick?" he asked, in a hoarse whisper presently.

"Yes, Phil, it's true," replied the detective sadly, and in a low tone. "Can you hold on to yourself now, do you think?"

"I—I don't know. I'll try. Tell me about it, Nick. I can't look at her—yet. I dare not do it. I shall go mad. God, man——"

"There, there, there. Remember, everything depends upon you just now. But it won't hurt you to look at her now. It will do you good in this extremity."

He stood beside his friend, but he had to turn his back away when the latter got down on his knees beside the body of his wife, so beautiful in life, so strangely beautiful in death.

But Preston did not sob. He was dry-eyed.

He bent above the body on the floor, and his face grew harder and harder as he looked down upon all that remained of the being he had worshiped.

Nick did not utter a word, nor interfere at all in that struggle that he knew was going on in the heart of the stricken man. He waited.

At last Preston rose slowly to his feet. A great calmness had come upon him; the calmness produced by grief that is so awful as to leave no expression of it possible.

He had touched her. He had pressed his lips against her forehead. He had kissed her hands while he knelt there beside her.

"Nick," he said, with wonderful calm, considering the circumstances, "she is dead, isn't she? There is no doubt of that, is there?"

"Not the slightest, Phil."

"She looks as if she were asleep; there isn't a mark anywhere, that I can see."

"No."

"What killed her, Nick? Poison?"

"No; at least I don't think so. I don't know. We will have a thorough examination made as to that. Can I trust you to be left alone for a little while now? I prefer to report this at the office, in person, to telephoning anything down. I want to ask some questions before I let it be known what has happened."

"You can trust me. I'll just stay here and wait—and think."

He dropped upon a chair, facing his dead, as he made the last remark, and Nick slowly went from the room, leaving him so.

He sought the maid first, and found her weeping in her room. She had loved her mistress well, and she showed it now.

"Sarah," he said, "I want you to try to remember anything else you can about that man you saw when he was leaving the elevator. I'll ask you about it again later. Just now I want you to listen for any sound that may come from the lounging room. If you should hear one, go there at once. Mr. Preston is there."

"But you, sir—are you going away?"

"Only to the ground floor of the building—to the office."

In the lower corridor the detective summoned to him the employee who had spoken with Preston when they entered the hotel together. He was the head hallman of the place. He knew nothing about the instructions that Mrs. Preston did not wish to be disturbed, save that he had been told about it by the girl who had charge of the house telephones. Nick went to her.

"I want to know just what that message was that Mrs. Preston sent down to you," he said. "Mr. Preston wishes me to inquire about it."

The girl blushed, turned her head away for a moment, bit her lip, and then replied:

"I don't know that I ought to tell you about it, sir," she said, "without the permission of Mrs. Preston. I—I—thought it very strange at the time."

"You must tell me about it. I am an officer. Now why did you think the message strange, if you please?"

"Really, sir, I feel that I ought not to tell. It is none of my business, of course, but—Mrs. Preston has been very kind to me. She might not like it—and there may be nothing wrong about it, after all."

"Of course there is nothing wrong about it. Why are you hesitating?"

"Are you quite sure, sir, that no harm will come to Mrs. Preston if I tell you?"

"Certainly. I can confidently assure you of that," replied Nick.

"Well, sir, the reason I hesitated was because it was the voice of a man that called the message down to me. It was from Mrs. Preston's apartment—there is no doubt of that—but it was a man's voice that spoke to me; and I thought it strange, particularly when I got the message."

"Wait; it was not a voice that you recognized, was it?"

"No, sir. It was strange to me—utterly."

"You are quite sure that it did not belong to any guest of the house whom you may have talked with?"

"I am quite sure of that, sir. I have a good memory for voices."

"What was the message, word for word, as nearly as you can recall it?"

"I can recall every word of it. 'Hello!' the man said. 'This is Preston's apartment. Mrs. Preston wishes me to say that she is not well, and that she is not to be disturbed, on any pretext, till further orders.'"

"Was that all?"

"Yes."

"Did you say anything back?"

"Merely that I would attend to it."

"But you thought it strange that a man should telephone such a message to you from that apartment?"

"Yes, sir; particularly as I had seen Mr. Preston leave the hotel only a short time before, and directly after him the maid passed through the corridor with her hat on, as if she were going out also."

"I understand. Now, was there anything about the voice you heard that attracted your attention?"

"It was a remarkably soft and pleasant voice, yet wholly masculine; a deep baritone, I should call it, but a very soft one; and I thought it foreign."

"Foreign? Why?"

"I could scarcely tell you why. There was no real accent, and yet there was the suggestion of one."

"Could you place it?—the accent? Was it French, German, Italian——"

"No. I haven't an idea. It was not like anything I ever heard before."

"The fact that you saw both Mr. Preston and the maid when they went out suggests that you have sharp eyes, and see nearly all that is going on around you. Is that true, to a more or less extent?"

"Yes. I am usually very observing, sir."

"This is not a house where strangers come and go very much, is it?"

"No, sir; only when they come to call upon some of the guests."

"So I thought. Now, have you noticed any strangers around here, in the corridors, this morning?"

"Several who appeared to be strangers. There were only two whom I noticed particularly, though."

"Two. Can you give me an idea of how they looked?"

"The woman was veiled so that I could not see her face distinctly, but——"

"One of them was a woman, then? Before we consider the man, give me as good an idea as you can of the woman."

"She was rather under the medium height, I should say. She had very dark hair, and so I should judge that her eyes were dark, also. I could not see her features distinctly at all, but I should say that she was not more than thirty years old, if that, and that she is a pretty—an attractive woman. She was very stylishly dressed."

"Now the man. What can you tell me about him?"

"Not much more, I am afraid. He was tall, rather dark, and very handsome, I thought. He had a mustache that was as black as coal, and silken. His teeth were beautiful, and he had very bright, piercing eyes that seemed to look through you. He glanced in my direction once."

"He looked like a foreigner, then?"

"He did, and he did not; of foreign extraction, rather."

"How was he dressed?"

"Perfectly. His suit was of dark-blue material; a sack coat, a soft Fedora hat, a dark-blue tie; a ruby was set in his scarf pin, and he wore tan gloves. That is about all I can tell you about him."

"When did you first notice both those people?"

"When they came into the hotel and went directly to the reception room."

"Did either of them approach the desk?"

"No. They went directly to the largest of the reception rooms. I could see them through the door. The woman sat down; the man remained standing near her. I noticed them several times, and for quite a time. They seemed to be waiting for some one; at least, that was the impression I received—and then, when I looked again, the woman was still seated on the chair, where she had remained all the time, but the man had disappeared."

"Was that before or after you saw Mr. Preston leave the building?"

"It was immediately after I saw him go out—almost at the same moment. I bowed to him, and then looked again toward the reception-room door; it was then that I saw the woman was alone."

"You did not notice which way he went?"

"No; but I did see him when he returned very shortly afterward. He came from the direction of the elevators then."

CHAPTER VI.

A MOTIVE OR AN INCENTIVE?

"Miss Sanger," said the detective, "those two people whom you have described interest me very much indeed. Do you think, now, that you could estimate

the time that elapsed between the disappearance a the reappearance of the man after he left the wom in the reception room?"

"I could only guess at it. It might have been twenty minutes—possibly it was as much as half an hour; but I hardly think so."

"Did the veiled woman remain where she was all that time?"

"Yes. I am sure she did not leave her chair at all."

"When the man returned to her, what happened?"

"The man went to her and spoke to her—of course, I could not hear what was said—and she left her seat at once. Then they walked out of the house together as they came."

"You did not see either of them speak to anybody?"

"No, sir, I did not."

"You have said that Mrs. Preston's maid passed out of the hotel soon after Mr. Preston went out. Did the stranger you have been describing disappear from your view between the time that Mr. Prestion went out and the appearance of the maid?"

"Yes."

"In the beginning of our conversation you spoke about several strangers. What can you tell me about the others you saw?"

"Nothing that will interest you, I think. There were no other strangers in the house until some time later. Pardon me, sir, do you think that the man I described is the one who telephoned down to me from the Preston apartment?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so. It would seem so. The same man got off the elevator at about the time you describe at that floor. The maid saw him."

"I do hope that Mrs. Preston will not think that I——"

"Mrs. Preston will think nothing at all about it, I can assure you. If she were here to speak to you in my place, she would thank you for what you have said. I can assure you of that, also."

"Thank you. I am much relieved by what you say."

"And now, Miss Sanger, I want you to do two things for me, if you will. My name is Nick Carter—I will write down my telephone number for you. There it is."

"Yes, sir. I will be glad to do anything for you that I can."

"First, then, I want you conveniently to forget all that you have told me about those two strangers. No matter what you may hear, presently, and you will hear something, you are not to mention the subject again to any one but me. Will you consent to that?"

"Well," replied Chick, "can't you tell me what has happened? It is almost like the one you describe, Mr. Carter, that something is frightening it; like the cat

ays." ll tell you. But first I wish to im "Tell me about it." second thing I wish you to do fo "Madge is dark— mity occurs." nember."

"Of course I doubtedly recognize that man if you shou She is posse gain?"

"Ye it, were shadow of a doubt. He would recognize me, too; he stared at me enough."

"You are an attractive young woman, and possibly he is the sort that stares. The point is that you would know him if you saw him again."

"I would—positively."

"Very well, then. If you should see him again, at any time, no matter when or where, I wish you to remember that you will earn a whole year's salary, no matter what it is, at once, if you can keep him in view, or in any way discover where he goes, and will telephone the fact to me with the least possible delay. There is very little chance that you ever will see him again, but you may do so. If you should, you will remember?"

"Indeed I will."

"Thank you."

"Now, sir, won't you tell me——"

"Miss Sanger, something terrible has happened. You must not make any outcry to give an alarm when I tell you what it is; but you must know soon, and it may as well be at once. Mrs. Preston—be careful, now—is dead. Hush, Miss Sanger. Pull yourself together. Don't faint. There; that is better. Goodness, how pale you are."

"Was she—did that man——?" She did not complete the question, but the detective understood well enough wh it would have been.

"Yes," he said. "There is now no doubt in my mind that the stranger you saw, who came into the hotel with the veiled woman, killed her. Hush! That is why I want you to be silent for the present about what you have imparted to me, and it is why, if you should see him again——"

"Oh, I will call a policeman and have him arrested at once."

"Pardon me; you must do nothing of the sort. I wish you to do exactly as I have asked."

"Oh, I hope I will see him; I hope I will."

"So do I. Perhaps I can find him without your aid, but afterward I will want you to identify him in such a case. You could do that?"

"Indeed I could."

"Now, I must leave you. I have a duty to perform in acquainting the hotel with what has happened. You, the maid, and you and I are to know about it."

He left her without another word, and the manager.

* * * * *

At three o'clock that afternoon Nick Carter, the coroner, and two doctors withdrew to a private room together. They had just left the room where the body of Loyola Preston had been under examination; but the immediate cause of death had been at once apparent the moment effort was made to raise the body from the floor where it was found.

The woman's neck had been broken; the vertebræ had been snapped like a pipestem at that point just below the base of the skull; otherwise there was no mark upon her anywhere.

It could not even be determined how the fracture had been accomplished with intent.

Nick Carter realized that she must have been seized by musclar hands while standing erect, that while one hand held her, the other must have pushed or thrown her head sharply backward; but there was no evidence of it.

There was no bruise upon the forehead; no disarrangement of the hair as if it had been seized and used as a medium in the commission of the crime.

But the neck was broken, and in such a manner that it had caused almost instant death.

"I have seen a great many strange and unusual cases in my time," said the coroner, shaking his head, "but never anything like this one."

"There is a slight, a very slight bruise, just where the fracture occurs," remarked one of the doctors. "That might have been caused by the fracture itself, or it may be the consequence of a slight blow."

"For instance, with the outer edge of a man's hand?" asked the detective quickly.

"Yes. That might have done it. I have heard that the Japanese strike a severe blow in that manner."

"They do," said Nick. "A killing blow—and there are other Eastern people who can do it also. Now, suppose, doctor, that I should step toward you, so; should press suddenly against your forehead with the palm of my left hand, so; should then strike you with the outer edge of my right hand, so; would——"

"Great heavens, Carter, are you trying to break my neck? Why, I had no idea that such a slight blow as that one you used on me could produce such an extraordinary effect. Why, I will have a lame neck as the result of it, and you barely touched me."

"That is the way it was done, then," said the detective, stepping back into his place. "The man forced his way into Mrs. Preston's presence, somehow. I happen to know that the outer door of that apartment was not locked at the time. If it was the man I think it was, he had a pleasing presence and a pleasant voice. He must have used both to get near enough to her to perform the remainder of his errand there."

"But it hardly seems credible, Carter," said the coroner, "that a man such as you describe could commit such a horrible act deliberately; and he must have been a stranger to her, you say."

"Yes; I think he was a stranger."

"Then what was the motive? What could it have been?"

"There are people in the world, coroner, who do not need motives to kill; all they need is an incentive; and there is quite a difference between a motive and an incentive, for the former must be of more or less long standing; the latter may be the affair of a moment or of an impulse."

"You are right about that."

"This man, then, had an incentive. I think I know what it was—or, at least, that I can make a shrewd guess about it."

"What was it, then?"

"Another woman."

"Another woman? I don't understand."

"Neither do I understand. I am only guessing, but, nevertheless, I have something to go upon. The man—I have a fairly good description of him—did not go to the house alone. He was accompanied by a woman. I guess at her identity, but I have reasons for thinking that my guess is a good one, although she kept herself closely veiled, and remained very quiet, all the time she was in the house."

"Then why in the world don't you hunt her up and arrest her?" demanded the coroner.

"That is what I shall do—am doing, in fact, for my assistants are already at work on the matter. But this is what I was about to say: The man had no motive in committing the crime—only an incentive, and the incentive was to please the woman. I have not asked myself why he had the incentive, or what she did to induce him to act for her, but that he did act for her, I am convinced."

"You are much too deep for me, Carter," said the coroner, with a show of annoyance.

"I do not intend to be so. I have told you all this because I had a distinct purpose in view. That purpose you already know."

"You want us to give it out that it is a death from natural causes."

"Precisely."

"But what's the good? If it was a murder, as we now know it to have been, why not say so at once?"

"I have my own reasons, coroner, and you will give me the credit for usually having good ones."

"Oh, well, have your own way, of course. How long must it remain so?"

"Not long."

"And you will promise me to bring that murderer to justice?"

"Yes; I will promise you that, in regard to both of them, without the shadow of a doubt."

"Very well. I consent. But keep me posted, Carter, won't you?"

"Assuredly, coroner."

"Then that ends all that we have to do here for the present, doesn't it?"

"It does."

CHAPTER VII.

NICK CARTER'S CLEVER IDEA.

Nick Carter was alone in his study. It was the morning of the day following the events just related. He was seated in a chair near one of the windows, and was busily engaged in scraping and sandpapering an article which he held in his left hand while he worked with the right one, and which now began to shine. The article in question was the steel triangle that he had found resting upon the bosom of Loyola Preston, when he discovered her, dead on the floor of the lounging room of her apartment.

He had been for a considerable time engaged in scraping and otherwise removing the red paint with which it had been coated, and it was evident that he did not want a particle of it to remain. He had just completed his task when Chick entered the room.

"There," he said, holding the triangle aloft. "I'll tell you about this presently. Just now I wish to know what you have dug up about Madge."

These two had not seen each other since the morning of the preceding day, although, of course, Chick was aware of all that had happened since that time.

"Well," replied Chick, "it seems to be another case almost like the one you referred to when we were discussing it; like the case of Zel in the Doctor Quartz days."

"Tell me about it," said the detective.

"Madge is dark—a pronounced brunette, if you remember."

"Of course I remember."

"She is possessed also of certain fascinations which, I take it, were not without their effect upon those who had her in charge over there."

"Well?"

"Another dark person—a man, however—called upon her frequently while she was in the hospital. She told them there that he was her brother, and it is generally believed that he was. I have never heard that she had a brother; have you?"

"No. Go on. You know as well as I do that it was the chap who brought the idea of the red triangle to this country, and to her."

"Well, they were awfully circumspect every time he called. Not a thing occurred to warn the attendants over there that all was not right, or that any idea of her escape was even thought of."

"Of course. That was part of the game."

"They were given more and more leeway when he was there. It finally came so that they were watched only from a distance. Not much attention was paid to what was said between them, and so they had opportunity for many confidential whisperings."

"Naturally."

"Then it came to the point when he was admitted for a moment after the regular hours; and once that Rubicon was passed he repeated the experiment. It finally got so that he was admitted to her at almost any time, provided it was not after the certain hour; and now the mystery comes in."

"I know what it was before you tell about it; but go on."

"Of course. That fellow must have been—must be—a practiced hypnotist; that seems to be the only way to account for that part of it."

"It is. All his people are that—at the place where he came from."

"You have accepted that idea—about the far East—as final, have you, Nick?"

"Yes; without the shadow of a doubt."

"Well, there came a night when he got there only a moment before the last minute when he could have been admitted under any pretext. Madge was much better. She had been sitting up at times for many days,

but that day she had not even returned to her bed at all. She was dressed when he arrived, and had told the nurses that she would be willing to return to the Tombs at any time when they chose to release her for that purpose. Altogether, she was very tractable."

"Go on."

"She was so well and so eager to see the man, her brother, mind you, that he was admitted 'for just a moment or two,' see?"

"Yes."

"The moment or two stretched out to many of them; and then the whole business—the entire bunch in that ward, patients, nurses, and all—seem to have fallen asleep. Not one of them—of any of them—remembers what happened; only that when things began to move again, neither Madge nor her brother were there. Both had disappeared."

The detective nodded. He understood.

"They were obliged only to get out of that ward without discovery, for they were provided with cleverly forged passes which took them out of the building without difficulty; and once they were upon the street all trace of them was lost. That's the whole story."

"Describe the man," said Nick. "Of course I know him to be the same man, but you have not heard the other description, and so I want the one you got down there."

"Tall, well built, elegantly dressed always, black hair and eyes, very white teeth, a mustache, blue suit, blue tie, ruby scarf pin, tan gloves——"

"Gee!" said Nick, "one would have supposed that he would have made some slight alteration about himself before he appeared at the Socrates; but he doesn't seem to have done so. He had his nerve with him."

"So did Madge, for that matter," said Chick.

"Yes; and she has got a lot of it. Well, is that all?"

"That is all until you tell me what I am to do next. By the way, are there any more red triangles showing up here?"

"There is one in every mail, nearly. No more have appeared on the front steps. Those sent through the mail are posted in all parts of the city. There is no way in which any of them could be traced."

"What were you doing with that affair there? What is it, anyhow?"

"It is the steel triangle that I found resting on the bosom of the dead Loyola, Chick."

"Indeed. What were you doing with it?"

"I was preparing it for a test I am going to make if the opportunity offers. It was covered with red paint, and I found that it had been recently painted. That fact gave me a hunch—that is, it reminded me of a fact that had escaped me for the moment. I had just finished scraping it when you came in."

"What was the hunch?" asked Chick.

"It is rather far-fetched, although there is a cult here in New York City right now that is practicing it. Chick, have you ever heard the theory that has been advanced by the cult to which I refer? It is to the effect that every child is born under a certain vibratory law; that every name that is given to human beings responds to certain vibrations; that where a person has the correct name, which responds to his or her vibratory law, that person is successful in life, and that where a person is not successful in life, that person has only to change his or her name to the correct one to become successful at once. There is a woman somewhere uptown, at this very moment, who gives lessons in that cult at five dollars a throw."

"Yes. I did read something about it in one of the papers, but I thought it a fake."

"No. It is a fact; at least so far as the existence of such a cult is concerned. But that is not exactly what I was getting at."

"What was it, then?"

"Those Himalayan people to whom I referred when we first saw the red triangle have long practiced a theory that is not dissimilar to this one of the cult. It is a country of vibratory laws, as I have explained. They also believe in a vibration—a vibratory law—connected with every name. Follow me?"

"I follow what you say—yes."

"Here in this country we sometimes give birthday rings, or birthday books, or something of the sort; there they give the children birthday triangles."

"Eh? Oh, I see."

"No you don't; not quite."

"Explain it to me, then."

"The triangle is made before the child is named. It is manufactured to correspond, in tone, to the correct vibration of that particular day and date, and that is determined by the position of the stars—and all that. See?"

"Go on."

"When the triangle is made, it possesses exactly the tone and key of that day and date, as I have said; and that particular tone, or, rather, the vibration produced by that tone, spells out the name that fits it. They have a rule for it; I don't know what it is, but possibly that woman uptown could tell us."

"Well?"

"So, you see, according to this weird belief, it is the triangle that names the child. The triangle belongs to the child. It is carefully preserved while the child is small, and when he grows to maturity it is given into his keeping. It is his. It is a part of him. It is his name."

"I understand that part of it; at least, how you mean it."

"Well, usually it is sacred to him all through his life. On no account would he part with it. He always carries it about with him wherever he goes. If he were found dead anywhere, the triangle would tell what his name happened to be."

"Sort of identification card, as it were, eh?"

"Well, something like that. Anyhow, when I saw that the red paint on this triangle was comparatively fresh, and could readily be removed, I set about removing it without loss of time."

"Thinking that it would spell out the name of the murderer for you?"

"No. Not that. I'm not joshing. I'm in dead earnest, Chick."

"Well, tell me just what you mean, then."

"I mean this: If you were standing there with your back turned toward me, and if I should step up closely behind you without your knowing that I was anywhere near, and then if I should shout 'Chick!' you'd be apt to start, and turn about, or otherwise show the fact that you had heard me, wouldn't you?"

"Yes. Most any person would betray himself under such a circumstance."

"Very good. You admit that?"

"Sure."

"Well, to those people I have been talking about, born with a triangle, named by a triangle, the tone struck from that triangle is a name. If I should step up behind the man who was named by this triangle, and strike it with a metal substance, it would give forth a ringing sound, suddenly and sharply."

Chick nodded. He understood now.

"That ringing sound would be a name—that man's name. If he heard it, he would recognize it as instantly as you or I would recognize our own names under like conditions."

"I see now. I see what you are at. If you think you run across that chap, but are not sure about it, all you've got to do is to step up behind him and strike a blow on that triangle. He will do the rest."

"I don't know. It is worth testing, anyhow."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DETECTIVE'S NARROW ESCAPE.

"What I don't understand," said Chick, "is why the fellow should consent to part with his triangle, and leave it where you found it, if it is as precious to him as you have indicated."

"I don't understand that, either. There is only one explanation, but whether it is satisfactory or not remains to be seen. I accept it, however, because it also explains another important point in this case."

"What is that?"

"The puzzling one as to how Madge ever came in contact with a member of that strange tribe of people."

"I was thinking of that, too."

"In that country, Chick, when a man breaks the laws, he is put to death after the manner that I have already described."

"Yes."

"Once in a century, perhaps, a man who has broken the laws, and who knows that he will be put to death, makes his escape over the mountains into the world beyond. Now, this fellow must be such a man as that, and he must have been a long time away from that far country, for his dress, his speech, and his deportment, as he was described to me, would indicate that."

"And so you think he has grown tired of the triangle?"

"He has doubtless lost his reverence for it and his superstition about it. A man who resides for a long time in this intensely practical country of ours, necessarily becomes thoroughly practical himself. Zanabayah did when he was here; this man will have done the same."

"That accounts for his separation from the triangle; but how about Madge?"

"Madge, my dear chap, is an accident, and a charmer. If the man has been a long time in New York, it is not strange that they should encounter each other on the street. She would not hesitate to make eyes at him if she cared to do so. They are an impressional lot where women are concerned. With her feminine arts, Madge could twist the man around her finger in short order. That is how I account for all that."

"It is the simple explanation—and the likely one."

"I think so."

"And now the question is to find them."

"There is one thing fairly well settled in my mind as far as that is concerned."

"What is that?"

"We won't find either of them around the slums. If they are hiding in the city, they are doing it in a high-toned place."

"Well, Mr. Triangle—by the way, that isn't a bad name for him, is it?"

"No. We will speak of him as Triangle for the purposes of identification, if you like."

"I take it that Triangle isn't much of a rounder, then."

"It isn't likely. Those people are absolutely abstemious. They have no intoxicating liquors in the country; such a thing is unknown."

"All the same, he might easily take lessons in drinking for nothing after he got here; and most of those fellows who never touched it call for it, all right, once they are good and plenty up against it."

"No, Chick," said the detective, shaking his head, "we won't find them in the slums; we'll find them in the higher-toned districts of the city when we do find them."

"All right. It is immaterial to me so long as we do find them."

"Another thing: We won't find either of them looking in the least as they appeared yesterday morning at the Socrates."

"Eh? Why not?"

"They are the most expert people in the world—Triangle people, I mean—in dye stuff. They can stain their skins to a light shade or a dark one; to any color, in fact, so perfectly that you would never suspect that it was not the natural color of the skin itself. They can dye their hair, and keep it dyed, any color from snow-white through all the shades to dead-black, with the same skill."

"Well, even so, I don't suppose they can alter the shape of their features, or their manner of walking and talking, the way they use their feet and hands, how they carry their fine heads on their shoulders, and all that, can they?"

"No; it isn't likely."

"I'd know Madge in a crowd of ten thousand if I only saw her back. I think, bar none, she is the most graceful woman on her feet I ever saw; and say, catch a woman disguising her grace of motion, will you?"

"You're right about that, Chick."

"I haven't seen the man; neither have you, for that matter; but that girl up there, at the Socrates, has seen him. I rather think from what you have said about her that she is smart and keen. I wouldn't wonder if she would be able to help us when it comes to a pinch."

"Possibly."

"So the thing resolves itself into the fact that we don't know whether we're looking for a pair of brunettes or a twain or peroxides, eh? It may be a brace of redheads, at that—or towheads, even. I say, Nick?"

"Well?"

"Those dye stuffs you talk about—can they wash 'em off again?"

"Oh, yes. They have a method of restoring their skins and hair to the natural color at any time it pleases them."

"All right. Then we may expect to find the two of them as brunettes or blondes; young or old; red or brown, white or fawn color; but always, you think, they will be swell."

"I think so. Triangle doubtless is well supplied with money."

"What I can't get through me is why he should consent to take the chances he did in going to that room and murdering Loyola as he did."

"He did it merely because Madge asked him to do it—to please her. That is the only reason that can be assigned for the act at the present time. That is why he sent the triangles. He wanted to frighten us first; or she did. It is all the same."

"And I suppose we can be looking for ours next; eh?"

"Seriously, Chick, you may. Let me impress upon you the importance of not being for one moment off your guard."

"Oh, I am on my guard, all right."

"Such men as Triangle are utterly without human compassion; they have no conscience; he would strike you in the back, on the street, as readily as he would bow to you in the corridor of a hotel. He would fling vitriol into your eyes as readily as he would spray himself with perfume—and, by the way, they are great people over there for perfumes."

"Maybe they need it."

"Don't forget to be on your guard, Chick. And now get out and do something. I haven't any orders to give you. You know as much about the case as I do, so work on it after your own fashion."

"Has Patsy returned?"

"Yes; and is out now on the case."

"Did he discover anything at Sing Sing?"

"Not a thing. It isn't likely that Belden and Brown know a thing about what has happened."

"And if Madge has taken up with this handsome East Indian triangle, it isn't likely that they will know about it. He is likely to look out for that part of it."

"Quite so."

"Have you seen poor Phil to-day?"

"Yes. A couple of hours ago. I have ordered him to remain in his rooms till after the funeral, which will take place to-morrow. In his present condition it would be no trouble at all for them to murder him outright. He is blind with his misery."

"Poor chap. Are you going out, Nick?"

"Presently."

"I don't suppose you could fit me out with another triangle like that one, could you?"

"Hardly."

"That idea of hitting it a clip close to Triangle's ear suits me. I'd like to see him wheel about and look surprised—and then feel the cold press of steel handcuffs on his wrists. I wouldn't wonder if something would come of that idea if what you say about it is a downright fact."

"It is."

"Well, I think I will do the hotels, as a newspaper reporter would say. So long."

It was not long after Chick had taken his departure when the detective rose, put on his hat, dropped the triangle into one of his pockets, and also went into the street.

It was an aimless venture that he started upon. There was nowhere to search for the two persons he wanted. There was absolutely no clue as to their location at that time.

They might have left the city; they might be boarding on the same avenue where he lived. There was not a thing to indicate where they might or might not be staying.

Nick felt that there was only one way in which a clue would be supplied to him, and that was in some effort that might be made to injure him, or one of his assistants, as the threat of the triangle plainly intended.

He walked up Madison Avenue and turned through one of the streets toward Broadway, hoping that Madge or her companion would not long delay in making some sort of an attack upon himself, for he did not for a moment doubt his ability to meet and overcome it, no matter what form the attack might take.

And he felt that he had provided against danger to Phil Preston.

He had given specific directions that his friend was not to leave the apartment, and had received a promise to that effect. Also he had asked, and had obtained, a detail of two men from headquarters, as guard over him, to see that no harm came to him from his enemies.

The detective was walking through Thirtieth Street, and he had almost reached the corner of Broadway, when he chanced to notice a man and a boy who appeared to be talking together on the opposite side of the street.

The man's back was turned toward the detective, and all that he noticed in that casual glance—for it was only casual, there being nothing whatever to cause it to be otherwise—was that the man was evidently past middle age, and very white, and that the boy was apparently a newsboy who had sold out his supply of papers.

He walked on without looking toward them again; and had forgotten them, indeed, until he was very nearly at the corner; and then he heard a voice beside him, speaking to him.

"Here, mister," said the boy he had noticed, "take this—quick—it's for you."

He shoved something that was round in shape into one of Nick's hands, and turned away, running with all his might; and Nick, with an impulse born of intuition rather than any other motive, instantly tossed the article into the middle of the street.

It was well that he did so.

Even before it touched the pavement in falling, there was a terrific explosion, as if a dynamite bomb had been touched off then and there.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MYSTERY OF THE MAN WITH THE BOMB.

The excitement of the moment was intense.

Fortunately the street was not crowded at the time, and the explosion was far enough into the street away from Broadway, so that the hurrying throng which is always passing up and down that famous thoroughfare was not particularly endangered.

But, as it was, many persons were thrown to the pavement, others were frightened nearly out of their wits, a dozen horses in the immediate neighborhood tried to run away, and were with difficulty prevented from doing so.

Several windows close to where the explosion occurred were smashed to splinters, and the broken glass fell with crashing noise into the street.

No one seemed to know from whence the explosion originated.

Nick Carter's forethought in tossing the bomb into the middle of the street, and quite far away from him, had removed it to a sufficient distance so that he suffered no ill effects from it; and besides, he had sensed what it was in that instant when he tossed it from him.

Therefore, what the people in the vicinity saw when they found wit enough to look to see what had happened was a man—Nick Carter—leap into the street and dash across it, running at full speed.

For that is exactly what Nick Carter did.

He understood on the instant that the man he had seen talking to the boy at the opposite side of the street had given the bomb to the lad with instructions to deliver it "to that man over there"; and probably he had lighted it, or had touched a spring which communicated with interior clockwork to set it off at the instant of giving it into the boy's hands.

It was a dastardly thing to have done at all, for the lad might well have been the sufferer.

But when the explosion came Nick realized that it was the man he wanted.

He did not wait for anything. He did not pause to offer explanations.

The man had started to run also. Nick could see him dimly through the haze of smoke and dust as he rounded the corner into Broadway and mingled with the throng.

Nick believed, in that instant, that he could overtake the man; but the very effect of the explosion helped to render that an impossibility.

Everybody knows how quickly a crowd will collect anywhere along Broadway, and the awful noise of the explosion drew all persons in that direction instantly.

The man, too, had the start, for he had begun to move away out of the vicinity the moment he gave the bomb to the boy. He was almost around the corner when the explosion took place.

As the detective dashed after the man, the crowd turned and started back toward the corner to see what had happened. The throng met Nick, and impeded his progress—and there were many in that crowd who, seeing him running away from the spot, naturally supposed that he was the author of the incident.

Cries of "Stop him!" "There he is!" "Catch him!" and the like arose on every side, and the detective had not reached the opposite side of the street before he was hemmed in on every side, and further running was, for the moment, rendered impossible.

He tried to call out to men in that crowd to stop that other man, but no one understood what he said, or if it was understood, it was not heeded.

And Nick could see the fugitive leap into the tonneau of an automobile that appeared to have been waiting for him, and start away up the street while he himself was totally unable to follow, or to do aught to stop the fellow.

Nick abandoned the effort, for he saw that it was useless.

Nothing could be done there, and the man could not be prevented from making good his escape; there was no help for it, and so the detective resigned himself to the inevitable, and turned back again toward the corner to explain the circumstances as best he could.

Many in the crowd that had so quickly gathered were angry now. Mobs are strange things, and are wholly animal.

Eager hands seized upon Nick, and but for his great strength he might have been roughly handled.

As it was, he shoved them aside one by one, elbowing his way toward a policeman who was at the very centre of the throng, and who knew him well.

Fortunately, too—on account of the others rather than on Nick Carter's—the officer saw him approaching, and started toward him.

"Hello, Barney," said Nick, as they came together. "Shoo this crowd away, will you? That bomb was intended for me, but as it did no damage, the least said about it the better."

"Was it y'rself they were after, Mr. Carter?" asked Barney. "Arrah, there, stop your crowdin', or I'll be afther takin' th' bunch uh yeh in. Can't yeh see that it was nothin' but the blowout of a tire? Git along, now. Nobody is kilt. Nobody is hurted."

Several men in the crowd sought to assure him that Nick was the one who had thrown the bomb—at which the policeman was highly amused.

"Sure, can't yeh see?" he asked them. "This is me side partner; a copper like meself, only he's in plain clothes. Git along wid ye, now."

And they did get along.

The sheer good nature of Barney prevailed upon them where more forcible measures would have accomplished nothing at all.

A street crowd in the city of New York will disintegrate and scatter almost as quickly as it will form, and the consequence of this one was that in a surprisingly short time it had disappeared and the thoroughfare had reassumed its former aspect.

Big Barney had to return to the middle of Broad-

way to his duty, and Nick was left to do as he pleased again.

He was about to start away when he saw a small form lurking near some steps on the opposite side of the street, and recognized the boy who had attempted to place the bomb in his hand. He started toward him.

But the boy saw him at the same moment, and started to run away like a frightened hare; but two men who were coming along the street toward the detective saw the boy, and stopped him.

"You needn't run away from me, my lad," said the detective kindly, after he had thanked the men, and they had passed on. "I mean you no harm, and you did not mean any to me, did you, my son?"

"No, sir; no. Indeed, I did not," was the half-sobbing reply.

"Well, you needn't be frightened. It's all over now, and no harm is done to anybody. A broken window or two is all the harm the thing did. But I want you to tell me about it."

"I ain't got anything to tell, sir," whimpered the lad. "The man gave it to me——"

"You did not know what it was, did you?"

"Indeed I did not. If I had I'd have thrown it at him; I would."

"I saw you talking with him before he gave it to you. What was he saying, and how long had you been talking with him? Tell me all about it."

"I was coming around the corner from Broadway when he stopped me, and he asked me if I wanted to earn a quarter. I told him that was what I was here for, to earn all the quarters I could. Then he told me that he had a package that he would want me to deliver in a few minutes. Then he gave me the quarter and told me to wait."

"When did he point me out to you?"

"Oh, not then. Not until several minutes later."

"But if it was several minutes before you were told to give the bomb to me, I must have been the other side of Fifth Avenue, then," said Nick, in amazement.

"I don't know anything about that, sir. I only know just what happened to me."

"Well, that is all I want to know. How long a time do you suppose it was after the man first spoke to you before I was pointed out to you, and you were told to put the package into my hands? Try to fix the time if you can."

"Well, I'd bet a big apple that I could have run as far as the St. James Building and back again in that time," answered the boy, measuring the time in the only way that was a criterion to him.

"That is, three blocks and a half," said Nick. "There and back again would be the equivalent of seven blocks. Now, supposing that you would make each block in thirty seconds, it would fix the time at three and a half minutes."

"Well," said the boy, with a quiet conviction in his tones, "I'd say that it was nearer ten minutes than three; but you know how to figger and I don't."

"Come along, boy, and take a walk with me," said the detective, paying no attention to the comment that had been made. "We will walk as far as Madison Avenue and back again."

"Say, mister, you ain't foolin' me, are you? I ain't going to no station house. I ain't done anything."

"No. I am not going to do anything to you, only give you another quarter when you have walked a little way with me and back again. I want to time myself, and I want to talk more with you while I am doing it."

He opened his watch, glanced at the dial and snapped it shut again.

Then, knowing that he had been walking at his usual pace when he came through the street, he started forward at that same gait toward Fifth Avenue; and they continued on across it to the corner of Madison Avenue, where Nick came to a halt and instantly looked at his time again.

The time consumed in that walk had been just two and a half minutes, thus leaving—if the boy's estimate had been approximately correct—between a half minute and a minute of time to be accounted for. The fact puzzled Nick, for while they walked along they had kept up the conversation, and the boy had told him all that was said. It was amazing, under the circumstances, to say the least.

The stranger, white-haired and having the outward appearance of an old man, had accosted the boy and offered him a quarter to deliver a package, presently, to a man who would come along that street, or one near it—the man was not sure just yet.

An instant or two later the man who had appeared to be looking at the tops of the buildings near at hand, had told the boy that they were in the right street.

After that they had stood there together quite a long time, the boy thought, and then the man had looked straight down the street toward Fifth Avenue, and had said that he thought the man was coming.

There was still another wait after that of quite an

interval, and the man had taken a package from one of his coat pockets, had partly undone it, had seemed to do something with it, looking up, and across the street every instant as he did so—and then, suddenly, he had thrust the package into the boy's hand and exclaimed:

"That is the man over there—that one—Here, take this package. Run across the street with it; shove it into one of his hands; tell him it's for him, and then run like hell!"

Nick Carter was amazed by this story.

First, the man must have known that he was due to leave the house at about that time; again, he did not know what street Nick would walk through toward Broadway, but he had a way of finding it out in time to act. The whole affair was astounding from beginning to end.

CHAPTER X.

A CLUE AT LAST.

There is never an effect without a cause.

The stranger—the man was doubtless Triangle, although there was no proof of the fact—standing at the northeast corner of Broadway and Thirtieth Street talking with the lad, and engaged in inducing the boy to deliver the bomb into Nick Carter's hands when he should appear, could have had no means of knowing, without the aid of another, when Nick Carter would appear, or what street he would pass through between Madison Avenue and Broadway, when he did appear.

But with the aid of another, or of two others, the matter would be an easy one to adjust.

For instance, a code of signals could easily be arranged so that a person watching the front of Nick Carter's house, and seeing the detective leave it to go upon the street, could readily signal to the waiting man—and the rest might be as it had happened.

A little thought convinced Nick that this was undoubtedly the method that had been employed; and it convinced him, further, that he was not the only one who stood in danger from the enemy, because of those signals.

If Nick himself were seen to leave the house, and the fact were signalled to some person who was waiting to do him an injury, the same rule would apply equally well to the others who had been threatened—to Chick, and to Patsy.

Patsy had gone forth earlier in the day; Chick had preceded Nick Carter by only a few minutes. Had they, too, run into danger of some sort?

Nick thought of these things, but he concluded the thought with a shrug of his shoulders for if there had been danger ahead of his two assistants, they had already encountered it, doubtless, and anyway, they were as able to cope with it as he was himself.

The thing which puzzled the detective just now was the method by which the affair had been accomplished. How had his enemies known of the moment he left his own home; how had they known in time to signal to their confederates just what street he would pass through; and how had they communicated these facts to others?

When he had returned to the corner of Broadway he gave the boy a liberal tip, and stood there for a time deep in thought; then, abruptly, he turned about and slowly retraced his steps again toward his home.

He was resolved to make another trial of the thing, so he entered his own house and remained there for a time as if he had returned for a specified purpose.

Nick even went to the extent of making some changes in his appearance, though not enough to create a disguise—but it gave the enemy time to gather their scattered forces and to be prepared for him when he should again venture from the house.

It was apparent that they were now intent upon carrying out the threats comprehended by the sending of the triangles; that having slain one of their intended victims they were determined to lose no time in wreaking vengeance upon the others who remained.

When Nick approached his home this last time he watched up and down the avenue, and also along the houses on either side of it to discover, if possible, something that would uphold his theory; and when he entered his house he wished heartily that Chick or Patsy were on hand to assist him.

But Ida Jones, his woman assistant, was there, and when he was ready to go forth again he called to her.

In as few words as possible, he told her exactly what had happened, and what his theory was regarding it.

"It is the very best opportunity we have had, or probably will have, to get directly upon the trail of those assassins, Ida," he said. "If we can spot one of the persons who do the signaling, that person will, ultimately, take us to their principals."

"It goes without saying," she agreed.

"Therefore, in the absence of Patsy and Chick, I am going to ask you to do quite a stunt for me."

"I am ready, whatever it is," she replied.

"Very well. Go to my dressing room and rig yourself out as a lineman. You will find all that is needful there. When you are ready, bring a bag of tools and a coil of wire to sling across your arm. Call to me as soon as you are ready for work, and remember that the men we are after have sharp eyes."

"I will remember. They will think that I am what I appear to be."

She disappeared, and in a surprisingly short time reappeared prepared for her task, whatever it might be. And she did look the part.

Her hair, done in a coil at the top of her head, was concealed by a cap that was pulled tightly down over her brows. A leather coat she wore was well provided with pockets which bulged with tools of the profession she represented. A belt, with other tools thrust beneath it, encircled her waist. Creepers for climbing poles were strapped to her legs, and she carried a coil of wire over one arm.

"Good," said the detective, as he surveyed her critically. "You'll do."

Some of the readers do not know, or have forgotten, that Nick Carter owns the house that is directly in the rear of his own and which fronts upon another avenue, but it is true, and he has made good use of it time and time again, as described in many of the histories written about his cases.

That house was, and is, tenanted by people who are every ready to assist the detective in his efforts; and there is a covered passageway between the two.

"Now, Ida," said Nick, "I will give you your instructions."

She looked up at him intent upon what he might have to say.

"I want you to go through the passageway to the other house, and thence out upon the street," he told her. "From there walk around the block, approach this house, but enter at Mr. Garrick's, next door. In the meantime I will have called them on the telephone, and will notify them of your coming.

"When the door is opened for you at Garrick's, I want you to stand on the front steps a few moments, as if you are parleying about a wire that must be repaired, and as if they are reluctant to permit you to pass through their home. See?"

"Perfectly."

"Once you are admitted, proceed at once to the roof, and immediately make yourself as busy as can be with the wires up there. Remember that you must act in a perfectly natural manner, or the sharp eyes of the triangle men will get onto you."

"I think I understand perfectly."

"If they are on the watch, as I am sure they are, they already know that neither Chick nor Patsy is at home. Again, the fact of your entering at the adjoining house will tend to throw them further off their guard."

"I think so."

"Now, while you appear to be working, you must be watching. You must not permit the very slightest thing to escape you. You must see everything."

"I will try to do so."

"The men of the triangle are keeping watch of this house from somewhere. Just where it is I do not know, but more than likely it is from one of the houses opposite, where they may have secured rooms temporarily. Again, they may have a sentinel or two on the roofs of other houses near at hand."

"Yes."

"Wherever they are, you must find them—and once you have spotted one of them you must do your utmost to find out more about that person. Understand?"

"Yes."

"As soon as I have reason to think you are well upon the roof, I will start out again, and I will walk slowly down the avenue, not up it as I did before. I will sneeze twice in front of the house when I am starting."

"Very well."

"You should be able to get onto their manœuvres by their manner of watching me; and also of signaling to their confederates the course I am taking in going from the house. I will walk down the avenue to Twenty-sixth Street, through that street to Broadway, and up Broadway to Twenty-seventh Street, and will enter the Hotel Victoria by the side entrance. I will go at once to the telephone booths and will tell the girl in charge of them that I am expecting a call, and you will call me as soon as possible there. I will wait there until you do call me if it takes all day."

"Very good. I understand perfectly what you wish me to do."

"Then go ahead."

A little more than ten minutes later Nick Carter, standing concealed by a curtain at one of his own front windows, saw Ida, dressed as the lineman, hurry up the steps of the house next door, and ring the bell.

After that he waited for a considerable time, for he

did not wish that there should be any mistake in Ida's being entirely prepared for him when he should go out; but as soon as he believed there could be no doubt of that, he passed again from the house into the street.

He paused at the top of the steps and looked carefully in all directions to see for himself, if possible, some indication that his movements were observed.

But he was able to detect nothing of the sort, and so he deliberately turned down the avenue, sneezing and blowing his nose violently as he went.

He did not try to watch the roofs of the houses he was passing, for that was Ida's job, and he did not wish to make it any more difficult by acting as if he were at all suspicious; and so he kept on, making the turns he had agreed upon, but watching keenly ahead of him all the time, lest another bomb should be hurled at him or some other method be employed to do him injury.

But he arrived at the Victoria without incident, went inside and to the telephone booths as he had arranged; and there he waited.

A half hour passed; then an hour, but no call came from Ida Jones, and Nick began to be vaguely alarmed lest some harm had befallen her, although she had not been one of the threatened ones.

An hour and a half, and then two hours, and the time he had waited was approaching two and a half hours when the operator at the telephone nodded to him and mentioned No. 4 booth.

He entered it at once, closed the door and seized upon the receiver. Ida's voice greeted him.

"Yes. It is I," he said. "You have been a long time, Ida."

"It couldn't be helped," she responded. "The watchers whom you suspected were on the roofs of the houses opposite, were on the roofs all right, but they were on our side of the street. There were two of them; one was located several houses below ours, and the other was about the same distance above it; and there must have been two more at least whom I could not see from the position I occupied, for those on the roofs signalled to others in the street in both directions."

"Well? What more?"

"I have succeeded in tracking one of them. I think you should come here where I am at once."

"I think so, too. Where are you?"

"In the street, just outside the café of the Rolland House."

CHAPTER XI.

NICK WORKS ONE OF HIS DISGUISES.

When Nick Carter approached the Rolland House from the direction of Broadway a few minutes later, he looked about him for the lineman, for it had not occurred to him that Ida would have taken time to change her clothing.

But it was Ida Jones whom he presently discovered—Ida herself, in correct street attire—standing beside a cab that was drawn up at the curb, and busily engaged in conversation with the driver.

She saw him as he approached, and went to meet him.

"There are two of them inside, now," she said, indicating with a nod of her head the outer door of the café.

"They may pass out at the front of the hotel while we are standing here," said Nick.

"No. I was fortunate. I met Patsy. I signalled to him as we approached each other, and did a little deaf-and-dumb alphabet talk with him. He caught on. He is now at the front of the hotel, and he knows who he is watching."

"Good. Now tell me all about it."

"May I remind you of one thing?" asked Ida naively.

"Certainly. What is it?"

"You are not in any sort of disguise. Those men know you. If one of them should chance to look out at a window——"

"It can't be helped, Ida. Tell me your story, and make haste, please."

"I had some difficulty in avoiding suspicion when I found that the men were on the roof on our side of the street, but I think I managed to do it. As soon as I was certain that I was right about them, I began to figure it out that it must necessarily be some time before either of them would go upon the street. If they were set there to watch they could not leave their posts until they were relieved by others."

"Quite right."

"I also reasoned that it would be impossible for them to get to the streets or to the avenue without passing down through one of the houses in that block—or, rather, through two of the houses, since yours and the one where I was—the Garrick's—stand between the others, and are so much higher that they could not be crossed readily."

"Good reasoning. Go on."

"Well, I pretended to complete my work and I dis-

appeared. I got out of the lineman's clothes and into these as quickly as possible, and then I hurried to the street. That cab was passing and I hailed the driver. Then I sat in the cab in front of Garrick's until one of the men I had been watching made his appearance. He came out of Tomlinson's house."

"He probably has engaged a hall room there on the top floor," said Nick, nodding.

"Well, that man was joined by the other one at the corner of Madison Avenue and Thirtieth Street, and from there they walked through to this place. I followed them in the cab. When we reached Fifth Avenue the traffic policeman held me up for a time, and it was then when I saw Patsy, and succeeded in attracting his attention. That is all. I had to wait a long time in the cab before either of the men appeared, and that is why it was so long before you heard from me. As it was, I had to take a chance in going into the hotel to telephone."

"But are you sure that the men are still inside?"

"Yes."

"Then it would appear that they are waiting for some one?"

"That was my idea about it."

"That person could be no other than Triangle himself."

"Yes, or Madge."

"She would hardly meet them in the café of the Rolland."

"No; that is true."

"Remain here on watch, Ida, just as you have been doing. I am going around to the front of the hotel to speak to Patsy. If I do not return stay on the job."

Nick found his second assistant lounging just inside the front entrance of the hotel, but only nodded to him in passing, although he made an almost imperceptible signal at the same time, which Patsy understood perfectly well.

Then the detective passed on to the desk and engaged one of the clerks there in a low-toned conversation, which lasted only a couple of minutes. The clerk handed him a key at the end of it, and Nick disappeared from view in one of the ascending elevators.

In ten minutes he was back again, returning the key to the clerk with a word or two of thanks—but if you had seen him receive the key and later return it, you would not have supposed it was the same man who did both.

For the man who returned the key appeared to be rather past the prime of life, although marvelously well preserved; and he had the florid face of a person who is fond of good living, and who indulges himself to the utmost.

In short, Nick had made use of the only articles he had with him for a temporary disguise, and the fact that he had changed his clothes when at home aided him in this matter.

Now he was dressed in a black broadcloth suit, and the roomy pockets of it had contained a white wig, and a bristling white mustache. There were certain pigments which he was never without, and he had to steal some of the hair from the wig to manufacture the shaggy white eyebrows he now wore. But that is how the disguise had been made up so quickly.

After turning the key over to the clerk precisely as if he were a regular guest of the hotel, Nick turned toward the café, first signaling to Patsy with his eyes.

Patsy, therefore, followed Nick into the café, and Nick watched Patsy, for it must be remembered that Nick Carter himself had no idea of the identity of the men he was now after. He had not seen them at all, or supposed he had not, which amounted to the same thing. Patsy had seen them, indicated by Ida Jones, and Patsy passed into the café in order to point them out to his chief.

This is how he did it.

He realized, of course, that the two men would recognize him the instant he entered the café, for they were the sentinels who had been watching the detective's house, and therefore had seen him leave it earlier in the day.

Possibly his appearance would tend to frighten them; perhaps they might conclude from it that they had somehow been followed; but the likelihood was that they would regard the appearance of the young detective at that place as merely a coincidence, and would have no idea that their identities were known.

Patsy passed to the cigar counter and bought himself two cigars, passing the two men as he did so. Then, having lighted one of the cigars, he turned away toward the door by which he had entered, busily employed in placing the remaining cigar in one of his waistcoat pockets.

The two men were seated at one of the small round tables with which the café is provided, and as Patsy was walking past it the cigar somehow slipped from his grasp and fell upon the table directly between them.

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed, reclaiming it, but without so much as a glance at either of the men; and he went on, out of the café, into the hotel.

It was neatly done, and the two men had no suspicion of him. Nevertheless, Nick, watching, could see that they had recognized him, for they exchanged low words together, and shot significant glances toward the door after Patsy had gone.

Nick, in the meantime, had wandered to the bar and taken a glass of White Rock water. Then he went to the cashier and paid his check. Then he sauntered to the table next to the men and dropped upon a chair beside it.

He could not hear a word that passed between the two men, although they talked together constantly, but their language was couched in tones so low that it could not reach the detective.

But at least Nick was satisfied that he was now well on the track, and that sooner or later one or both of these two men would lead the way to the man he wished to find; to the man whom he had identified among his assistants by the name of Triangle—and also to Madge, who was the real instigator of the committed crime and of the others that threatened.

A newspaper was lying on the table where Nick took his seat, and he picked it up, using it as a means of appearing to kill time; and then he thought of still another use to which he could put it.

Turning and folding the pages he suddenly broke into laughter, and he laughed on and on; then he chuckled; then he laughed again.

"By Jove! That's funny!" he exclaimed at last, turning and half appealing to a man who was passing him at the moment. But the man, a stranger, of course, ignored him; and Nick after bestowing a contemptuous glance after the departing figure, laughed again.

This time he turned toward two men at the table on his left—not the two in whom he was interested—but they were busily engaged in conversation between themselves and paid no attention.

Nick shrugged his shoulders, chuckled some more, laughed some more, and then, quite naturally, turned toward the other two men—the ones in whom he was actually interested—for sympathy; and he had worked it up so well that he had succeeded in interesting them.

"These New Yorkers are so high and mighty that a stranger in town couldn't approach one of them with a locomotive," he said genially. "Did you ever see anything funnier than that?"

He reached out as he spoke and laid the paper on the table in front of the two men so that it showed one of Simmerton's cartoons; and, fortunately, it did happen to be a funny one. It even brought a grin to the faces of the two men as they glanced at it.

Perceiving this, Nick hitched his chair around facing them, chuckling as he did so.

"I'm glad that there is somebody here who appreciates a little humor," he said, giving his chair another hitch. "An old fellow like me likes to have somebody around to laugh in company with him, eh? Join me in a drink, gentlemen, won't you? I'll give you my word that I am dying of loneliness in this town with not a soul to talk to."

"We have just had a——" began one of the men, but Nick had already signalled to a waiter.

"See what the gentlemen will have," he ordered when the waiter approached. "Bring me a bottle of good mineral water. Maybe I drank too much that wasn't mineral water last night," he added, again addressing the two men; "anyhow, I'm on the water wagon to-day. But don't let that interfere in any way with your thirsts, gentlemen. You see, I'm naturally quite a talker—you are apt to agree with me on that point presently; at home they call me "Talky-talk," sometimes thinking that it'll make me mad; but, Lord bless you, it doesn't; I like it. Don't you see the fun in those pictures? I think they're great. They make an old chap like me sit up and take notice. And that chap that draws them certainly does have a knack of getting in the fine work on the masher problem to beat the band. Well, gentlemen, here's luck, and hoping that we may meet again sometime. It is a great pleasure, I assure you, to have you join me in this little libation. I was so lonesome that I didn't know what to do; and it's an awful feeling, if anybody should ask you. I'm not a countryman; I'm a city man; but it's a small city—up State, you know; and——"

He came to a stop. Another man had suddenly appeared at the table. He seemed to know the two men with whom Nick was trying to talk, and—he was the white-haired man who had given the boy the bomb that Nick threw from him in Broadway.

CHAPTER XII.

A NOTE ON THE STEEL TRIANGLE.

The newcomer stared at Nick for a moment; then he bowed coldly.

"A friend of yours?" he asked sarcastically, of one of the men.

The detective at once broke in with a voluble ex-

planation as to how he came to be one of the party, letting his tongue run without stint for a moment, and then suddenly breaking off to say:

"But I beg your pardon, gentlemen. I'm an old fool. I should have seen that I'm a rank outsider here. You probably have business affairs to talk over and I'm in the way. Well, I hope I'll meet you all again sometime. Good day."

He left the table hastily and walked straight through the doorway into the hotel without turning his head, and just beyond the door he encountered Patsy.

More than that, Patsy had taken advantage of his opportunity and had done exactly the same thing that Nick had accomplished a little while previously, that is, he had procured a key from one of the clerks, had gone to a room and had altered his own appearance so that there was no semblance of the original Patsy left—and it happened that Patsy had more of the necessary articles for such a change with him than the detective had had.

It is not necessary to describe his appearance, more than to say that he was not now recognizable as the same individual who had dropped a cigar upon a table in the café a short time before.

Nick stopped his second assistant then and there.

"We've got them, Patsy, there isn't a doubt of it," he said rapidly. "A man has just entered who is, without doubt, Triangle himself. Anyhow, he's the chap I saw give a bomb to a kid in the street for the purpose of blowing me off the earth. I think they are good for a few minutes' talk in there before any of them starts away again, and I'm going to take a chance in altering this disguise again. Go in there and keep your eye on the three, but pay particular attention to the one with the white hair. If he should leave the other two before I return, go after him. Have you got a piece of chalk in your pocket, Patsy?"

"Yes."

"Well, use it if you have to leave a trail for me to follow; and—Look out! There he comes now."

Nick passed on through the corridor quickly, before the approaching stranger could see him in conversation with Patsy, and dropped upon one of the leather-covered chairs in the front of the building.

He saw the stranger go to the desk, then a boy was summoned to him and the stranger spoke to the boy, giving him a card upon which he had written a few words.

The boy disappeared and the stranger sauntered into one of the reception rooms and stood near a window, waiting.

Nick made a signal to Patsy, and the latter went out upon the avenue and called a taxicab from around the corner—the taxicab that was under Ida's orders.

"We will want this, I think," he told her. "Your job is over for the present, but if you are anxious to see the end of it, you can follow along in another cab. The chief and I will require this one."

He stepped inside the cab and waited where he could see the front entrance to the hotel, but he gave the driver certain instructions concerning the meaning of certain taps that he would make later with a key against the front window of the cab.

Inside the hotel Nick kept watch on the man in the reception room.

And the latter did not have long to wait. Within ten minutes of the time when he sent the boy upstairs with the card, a richly-gowned, elderly woman, with a profusion of iron-gray hair, made her appearance, and at once approached the man at the window. They looked to be a highly respectable, elderly couple, rich in the world's goods, as they stood there together.

The woman wore a veil which partly concealed her features; one of those puzzling veils through which one thinks that one can see, but nevertheless beyond which not a feature is plainly discernible.

The two talked together for a moment, and then moved slowly toward the outer door, and the man paused for a moment to speak a word or two to one of the hotel servants.

They passed out at the door and stood upon the steps until a green taxicab drew up at the curb; then they went forward together, and the man assisted the woman into it.

No word was spoken to the driver. It was evident that he had already received his instructions, and the cab was doubtless the one in which the stranger, whom Nick had no doubt was Triangle, had come to the hotel.

Nick went out upon the avenue and turned in the direction that the cab had taken; and he walked rapidly, knowing that Patsy would presently overtake him in another cab, for such had been the signalled instructions.

After a few moments, Patsy's cab ran along close to the sidewalk where Nick was walking, the door swung open and Nick sprang inside the vehicle without compelling it to slacken its pace perceptibly.

The instant that Nick was inside the cab he tore the white wig from his head, the mustache from his lips, and the shaggy brows from above his eyes, and with a handkerchief quickly wiped away nearly all the traces of the coloring he had used.

"We've got them, Patsy," he said, again. "That was Madge as sure as you're alive! And if that is so there is no doubt that the man with her is Triangle. We've got them."

After a little he looked back of him through the small window at the rear of the cab, and he said at once:

"There is a cab following us, Patsy. I wonder if it contains those two fellows of the café?"

"Likely enough," replied Patsy; "but I don't care if it holds a hundred of them. We are on the track now, and I can think of nothing but the misery of poor Phil Preston."

After that they rode on in silence for a time.

The cabs continued on their way up the avenue, going leisurely. It was apparent that the man and the woman in the forward one had no idea of being followed.

Nick, who had been looking through the small window at the rear of their cab, again said, suddenly:

"There are two cabs following behind us now, Patsy; and it seems plain enough that they are doing it intentionally, too. Are there more of them, I wonder?"

"Ida may be in one of them," replied Patsy. "I told her she could follow along if she cared to do so."

Again silence while the cabs continued up the avenue; but if the two persons in the one that was leading noticed that they were followed they gave no evidence of it, and Nick came to the conclusion that they had no thought or suspicions of such a thing.

Arrived at Forty-second Street their way turned sharply toward the right, and they continued in that direction as far as Lexington Avenue, and thence northward again.

But the cab that was leading this strange procession came to a stop at the entrance to the Lexington Avenue terminal of the New Haven Railroad. The cab in which the detective and Patsy were passengers went on past it, and stopped just beyond.

"Get down and follow them into the station," said Nick. "I'll follow along after you in a moment. It begins to look as if Triangle and his sweetheart were leaving town. I want to find out who is inside those other two cabs."

The man and the woman had gotten down by this time, had paid their driver, and were walking through the terminal entrance toward the trains—and Nick Carter had already determined that neither of them should be permitted to get upon any train. He would arrest both of them out of hand first.

Then as Nick waited, the first of the cabs that had followed the one he had been in came to a stop, and to the utter surprise of the detective, Chick sprang from it to the pavement.

"I saw you and Patsy had the other cab," Chick explained hastily.

"But where were you? How did you get on the trail?" asked Nick.

"I happened to be at the corner of Thirtieth Street and Broadway when the affair of the bomb happened," replied Chick. "I have been on that fellow's trail ever since. My being on the spot was purely an accident, but it enabled me to keep tabs on Triangle. And now we have all come together on the pathway; eh? Here is Ida."

Ida Jones descended from the last of the cabs, and then the three entered the station together, following after Patsy, whom they could see far in advance of them.

"Come along," said Nick. "We need not hesitate now. We will overtake them there at the stairway. We will surround them just as they are about to step upon it. Chick, you and Ida take care of Madge and look out for her, too. She will use a knife on you if she gets half a chance. I will tackle Triangle, for I know how to subdue him. Patsy can act as he thinks best. But—do you see this?"

He held up the triangle that Chick had discovered him once in the act of cleaning.

"When I strike this triangle with the key I hold in the other hand, the sound of it will be your signal for the attack," he said.

A moment later the detective, with Chick, Ida, and Patsy beside him, were directly behind Madge and her companion, and they were ready to spring forward. And then Nick Carter held the steel triangle well forward, close to the back of the murderer's head, and struck it a quick, sharp blow.

It rang out loudly; and the instant the note sounded, the man in whose ear it was struck started as if he had received a blow, uttered an exclamation in a foreign tongue, and half turned in his tracks.

But it was only to find himself seized in the powerful grasp of Nick Carter, while other hands laid hold of him also, and he knew instantly that he was a hopeless prisoner.

Madge struggled for a moment in the grasp of Chick, but she gave it up, too—and, taking advantage of her woman's prerogative, fainted.

That is the end of the story.

The evidence of the telephone girl at the Socrates was so conclusive—she positively identified the voice, and also the features of the man called Triangle—that both the man and the woman were convicted of murder in the first degree and, ultimately, both suffered for it. Indeed, Madge made a full confession after the trial when she realized that there was no hope. The man died as he had lived, a mystery, and he was never known by any other name than Triangle.

Philip Preston went abroad and remained away for more than a year. He recovered slowly from the effects of his bereavement, but it is gratifying to know that he did recover.

THE END.

If you were an actor, and every night in the audience sat a person with eyes like daggers—eyes that seemed to go through your very heart—what would you do? You couldn't have him put out. Having paid for his seat, he'd have a right to look at you as much as he pleased and with the only eyes nature had given him. Such a situation is one that figures in the next story—"Doctor Quartz Again; or, Nick Carter's Shrewdest Opponent." Many of you know the name of Doctor Quartz as that belonging to a rogue who has given Nick Carter many a hard task. The great detective really thought Quartz was out of his way for all time; but presto! here he is again, and giving Nick, Patsy, and Chick one of the most difficult and interesting puzzles they have ever tackled. The story will appear in No. 692—out next week.

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AN ISLAND ADVENTURE.

IT was a fine April morning, and Arthur and Willie Lovatt were eating their mackerel at breakfast in the Tregarthen Hotel, St. Mary's, as if they enjoyed it—as, in fact, they did. Mr. Lovatt, their father, a gray-bearded, anxious-looking man, appeared occupied with his thoughts.

But though the boys were making such a good meal, they, too, were keenly thinking about something. Arthur had already tried in vain to hint to his father what was in his mind, and Willie's. He now tried again.

"We couldn't have a better chance, father, Nance says. The glass is awfully high, and there isn't a wave anywhere."

"What's that, my boy?" asked Mr. Lovatt.

Arthur repeated his words.

"So much the better," said Mr. Lovatt; "the *Calabria* won't be so far off us in the course of the next twenty-four hours. I trust they may get clear of the rocky coast."

"Really, dad?" said Willie Lovatt. "I bet Rosy is sick enough already: won't she be?"

"Your aunt more likely," said Mr. Lovatt. "Please Heaven, however, they will make a good passage. Your uncle wants them home badly."

This time Arthur got out his petition straight.

"Oh, I say, dad, do let us go with Nance to St. Agnes to-day. He says it's splendid weather, and we do so want to see the lighthouse, and all that."

Mr. Lovatt hesitated, and then, glancing at the blue sky outside, said:

"Very well."

After that the boys hurried over the jam. They rang for Mary, the waitress, and told her to send for Nance at once. They also promised their father lots of fish by dinner time at seven o'clock, including mackerel, ling, cod, and perhaps a little whale. They were not particular to a fish. Mr. Lovatt smiled, and told them to be off and take care they got into no mischief.

"As if we could, with Nance!" exclaimed Arthur.

Then the immaculate Nance himself appeared in his blue jersey and top boots, and with a broad grin on his brown face. Him the boys wanted to dispatch immediately to get the boat ready. But the man liked to gossip. For one thing, he had to tell Mr. Lovatt about a mysterious, nameless body that he had found on Samson's shore, quite early that morning.

"A Frenchy, sir, I'm thinking, by his looks. But the reefs be a ter'ble bad place for finding 'em about. It's the currents and that."

"*Absit omen!*" said Mr. Lovatt gravely, causing Nance to stare.

In due time they proceeded to the boat and moved out of the harbor, past Rat Island, with a nice little breeze in the yellow-brown sail of Nance's boat, the *Penzance*. The tide was high. Few of the rocks in the roadstead between St. Mary's and Tresco were to be seen. And so they scudded merrily round the Battery Point, with the east wind in the sail, and soon had Big Smith and Little Smith right in front of them.

Nance, puffing at his pipe, looked the picture of contentment and strength as he sat at the tiller. The boys leaned over the gunwale and vowed they could see no end of fish, waiting, or following them, to be caught.

They were at Agnes in little more than half an hour.

But when they were making for Priglis Bay and the lonely little church alongside the rough landing place, Arthur Lovatt boldly proffered another request.

"Do run her out a bit farther, Nance," he pleaded. "We shan't get another day like this in a hurry, and we both do so want to see Meledgan, where they have the wrecks, you know."

"Meledgan's had no more wrecks nor any of the others, Master Arthur," remarked Nance. "The Retarrier reef's the worst, or was, before they built the Bishop. But Crebewethan, Rosevean, the Gillstone, and all of 'em's nearly as bad."

"Oh, never mind, Meledgan'll do!" continued Arthur.

"It's uninhabited; that's why we want to go there, Nance," said Willie Lovatt.

"There's a power o' rabbits on it," said Nance, as he looked about him. "But what 'u'd Mr. Lovatt be saying if he knew?"

"Saying! Why, nothing, of course. On a day like this what does it matter?" said Arthur.

"We'll see the silly old lighthouse another trip," urged Willie.

"Well," murmured Nance, "it do look settled like."

"Settled! Rather! And it'll be a good business for you, old man," said Arthur. "I'll give you an extra bob out of my own pocket, and we'll still have Agnes to visit, don't you see?"

Nance grinned.

"Out we go, then," he said, as he turned the tiller. "I'm after a young bunny or two myself, lads," he whispered, with a wink.

The shapely bows of the *Penzance* cut on, therefore, through the water. Agnes' white lighthouse was left behind, and so were the huge bowlders and fantastic rocks of St. Warna's Bay, in which centuries ago the wreckers used to pray for doomed ships, and, it is said, murder all who drifted alive to shore.

The tall tower of the Bishop lighthouse on its lonely rock four miles to the southwest stood out splendidly against the blue sky, and so did the cruel black crags of the Western Isles—hard, sharp teeth that had cracked the ribs of many a stout ship.

There was more swell on than Nance had bargained for as they rounded the north end of Meledgan, but it was nothing of a hindrance; and so in half an hour after leaving St. Agnes they ran the boat ashore, and were free to clamber onto the gorseclad rocks of the little island. Even while they were getting toward the land they could see a skurry of white tails among the wiry herbs and coarse grass, and the boys' eyes sparkled as they thought of the fun before them.

It was not fun for the rabbits, though—or, at least, for the five they managed, with Nance's powerful aid, to account for. Three were innocent young bunnies who had never yet seen a man, and paid for the curiosity which led them to look at the intruders more than was wise.

An hour was thus spent; then the boys declared themselves hungry. The sea air was much more racy on Meledgan than at St. Mary's they avowed.

But just as they were all about to set to work on the hotel sandwiches—perched on a glorious little nook of lichened rock overlooking a dangerous bit of reef, Nance fell to scratching his head and uttering exclamations.

"I'd clean forgot," he said, "that I was to see Mrs. Ashford, of Agnes, soon as ever I could. Her daughter, John Martin's wife, was took ill last night, and was worse this morning. Ashford was to have rowed her across."

"What a nuisance!" said Arthur Lovatt.

"We'd best be off this minute, boys," said Nance reluctantly.

Both the lads protested strongly.

"Well, then, I tell you what," proceeded Nance; "if you two'll be careful by yourselves, I'll run the *Penzance* over and be back in an hour."

"The very thing, Nance," cried Arthur. "You're a brick, old chap, and you'll see if we haven't knocked over another bunny or two by the time you return."

Nance considered it settled. He didn't think much of the haze that was stealing over the south, nor of the fact that the wind had shifted a point or two.

But when he got to Agnes and the Ashford's, the weather began to change in a startling way. They kept him talking in the cottage for more than half an hour. Afterward he went to the door, to find a regular Scilly mist over the island.

"You must wait a bit," said Mr. Ashford; "it'll blow over. Wind's not right for a downright bad un."

Nance waited most unwillingly, though he had to admit that as things were he could not easily—if at all—find his way back to Meledgan. He waited until five o'clock, and then gave it up. By this time the weather was fearfully thick. They could hear the booming of the Bishop fog bell—a dismal sound. This told them something more; namely, that the wind had gone to the southwest, a bad quarter.

"They're handy lads," he said to the Ashfords, who had later and better news about their daughter, and were staying at home; "else I'd be fain to spend the night on the water seeking them."

"Better they should have a rough night in the open, Nance," retorted Ashford, "than that you should drown, maybe, seeking them and finding them not."

This was how it came about that Arthur and Willie passed a night on Meledgan.

The two boys were so engrossed with the island that for some time after Nance's departure they did not notice the change in the weather. But the fog crept over them at length, and, to, their astonishment, they found that they could not see the Atlantic, though they were so near it. However, they thought it rather a joke at first. They didn't think it would keep Nance aloof.

But when three hours had passed and it seemed to be getting darker, Arthur Lovatt guessed what they were in for. The swell on the rocks made more and more noise, and they, too, heard the Bishop's bell—much more distinctly than Nance heard it.

At six o'clock they ate their remaining sandwiches and drank the last bottle of lemonade, which they had put by for Nance.

"We've got to sleep here—that's what we've got to do, you'll see," said Arthur.

Willie Lovatt said he thought it a fine lark. But Arthur was not so sure. He wondered how his father would like it, and he remembered that Willie was reckoned a delicate chap, with whom sleeping out at night might not agree.

However, they set to work and groped about. They had the luck to chance upon an excavated barrow—the grave of prehistoric inhabitants or visitors—which seemed the very thing. The hole was walled with three slabs of rock, and its mouth was closely matted with gorse and heather. They improved its floor with armfuls of dried furze and grasses, and, in fact, made a very fair nest in it for a couple of tired boys.

Only when this was done did they realize how the wind had risen in the meantime. It roared wildly over them, and though they could not see the water very well, they could distinguish the white of the foam and spray which dashed up from the waves as these broke against the granite teeth of the shore.

The evening crept on to night, a black, frightful night. The two boys had not dared to go from their bedchamber lest they should lose themselves and it. They sat side by side and tried to pretend that they enjoyed it. But when Arthur suggested that they should turn in and sleep, Willie agreed quite eagerly.

There had been talk about making a fire and cooking a rabbit, but the idea fell through. By daylight they might have attempted it. As it was, though hungry, they were not hungry enough to care to begin skinning the bunnies.

As a matter of fact, they were both so tired that they soon fell asleep in the snug prehistoric grave.

They had slept some hours when Willie Lovatt woke, rolled about, heard voices—or fancied it—and at once aroused his brother.

"There are people here, Arty," he whispered.

They both listened intently. Yes, the voices were audible enough; a confused mass of them, some crying. The wind had dropped so that they could hear them distinctly. The fog was denser than ever.

"Willie," said Arthur, "let's go out and see what it is."

Hand in hand, they stumbled in the direction of the clatter. Close to the coast they understood what had happened.

A vessel had run aground on one of Meledgan's reefs, and here it lay, pinned for its destruction.

The boys trembled with excitement. They could see nothing, but the voices were so very near. One, which must have belonged to the captain, could be heard trying to persuade the others that it would be all right in the morning.

"But where are we?" some one inquired dictatorially.

Arthur Lovatt shouted, "Hullo, there!" at these words.

"Ahoy!" came back an answering cry. "We're ashore. Help! who's there?"

"We're only two boys!" shouted Arthur. "It's Meledgan you're on. There'll be help in the morning."

The wash of the water sounded after this for a second or two, and then in the confused chatter the boys heard some one explaining that Meledgan was one of the Scilly Islands.

"Can't you come in your boats?" cried Arthur.

"No need, my lads, in this weather," was the cheery reply.

"We'll stand by," cried Arthur, just as cheerily. "That's the thing to say to encourage them, you know," he explained to Willie.

And "stand by" the boys did; or, rather, they sat on the rocks and talked and whistled. And all the time there was a constant buzz of talk, now loud, now soft, from the wrecked ship.

With daybreak, sure enough, came help. It came, first of all in the lifting of the fog as day dawned. The boys watched the steamer disclose itself little by little to them. They waved their caps and shouted and received answering signals from the ship.

But the strangest thing of all was when they could read the vessel's name and they saw that it was the *Calabria*, on board which their aunt and their little cousin were.

Then a boat was lowered, and three or four men easily joined them on the islet. They went back, however. There was no danger, they said; and with them they took the boys' love to Mrs. Grant, who was astonished enough to receive it, and fluttered her handkerchief to her nephews from the ship's side.

Hardly had this occurred, when Nance and his little boat came into sight, followed by others, whom the *Calabria's* rockets had drawn from Agnes.

There was a great conference on the big steamer; islanders and the ship's officers had much to say to each other. The upshot of it was that the *Calabria* was hopelessly wrecked, and that it would be well to get passengers and mails to St. Mary's as speedily as possible.

* * * * * * *

Never was man more relieved than Mr. Lovatt when he saw the *Penzance* come into St. Mary's harbor at nine o'clock, with his two sons safe and sound on board. He was just as astonished to see with them his sister and his little niece, whom he had hoped were well on their way to the north.

Later, the *Calabria's* captain entered the harbor. He had much serious business to transact by telegraph. But he had also time to shake hands very cordially with the two boys, and to tell Mr. Lovatt that, though they had not been able to help the ship, they had brought much comfort into the hearts of the passengers by their simple words.

As was expected, the *Calabria* became a total wreck; but no lives were lost. Had the weather been rough, not a soul would, in all likelihood, have been saved, and in the morning Arthur and Willie Lovatt would have seen a miserable sight among the Meledgan surf and rocks.

A GRIM RUSSIAN PRISON.

In the middle of the River Neva, where it flows out of Lake Ladoga, there lies a tiny island surrounded on three sides by the turbulent waters of the river and hemmed in upon the fourth by the cold and stormy lake. Upon this island stands a very ancient fortress inclosed by high walls more than twenty feet in thickness. This is the fortress of Schlüsselburg.

Day and night sentinels, relieved every two hours, pace around the top of these walls, keeping a vigilant lookout on every hand. No one from within the fortress, not even the soldiers or gendarmes, is allowed to communicate with the people who dwell upon the banks of the river. If the unwary fisherman chances to drift in his boat too near the walls of the fortress, says *McClure's,* he is greeted by the shout of a sentinel, aiming his rifle:

"Away! Or I shoot!"

Not even the Dead Sea in the deserts of Asia is so utterly isolated and cut off from the living world as is this fortress of Schlüsselburg, which lies within forty miles of St. Petersburg.

They are very ancient, the high walls of the fortress. In many places they are cracked from old age, and in the cracks little trees have taken root. They look sullen and ominously silent, as if they hid dark and grewsome secrets. And, in truth, in the whole world there are no other walls that have witnessed so many tragedies as those of the fortress of Schlüsselburg.

The régime and the aspect of the prison were carefully thought out and planned, being, as the ministers visiting the Schlüsselburg repeatedly declared to the prisoners, intended to demonstrate to them that it was destined to be their grave. The cells were constructed in such a manner as constantly to remind the prisoners of a tomb. The stone floors were painted black and the walls dark gray.

The window panes were opaque, so that no ray of sun ever penetrated within the cells and no trace of color from without could be caught by the prisoners. The iron bedstead was turned up by day and chained against the wall, and only a little stool, also fastened in its place, allowed the prisoners an occasional rest from the incessant stride backward and forward across the floor of the cell.

This pacing back and forth was in fact the only diversion permitted to the prisoners. No books were given to them except the Bible, which they had already learned from cover to cover in the fortress of Saints Peter and Paul, no work for their hands, no color for their eyes, no sound for their ears.

Cut off from the living world, buried in the black stone cells, clothed in the dingy prison garb, with one sleeve black, the other yellow, they strode to and fro from corner to corner of their cages. Their food was abominable: bread, half raw, made of rotten flour, and a plate of hot water in which floated a few shreds of meat or the traces of an onion.

THE GERMAN POLICE.

Prince Bismarck once said in the Reichstag, "We Germans fear God and nothing else in the world." A writer quoting this remark, suggests that he might truthfully have said, "God and the policeman." To a foreigner no feature of German life is more striking than the prominence and almost unlimited authority of the police. Many of its functions are such as in England or the United States would be entrusted only to a court of law; and what seems almost equally strange, the greater part of these functions are exercised quite independently of the local government.

The minuteness and thoroughness of its work are a constant surprise to the newcomer. The policeman not only preserves order in the streets, but exercises a "far-going authority" in private houses. As the writer already quoted says:

"He undertakes the nightly locking of your street door at a sufficiently early hour. He sees that you have your chimney regularly cleaned. At stated times he examines your stove, and while he is about it, he may inspect a few other matters of domestic economy—your outer locks, your pump handles, your ash-pit doors.

"Probably, if it be summer, he will also take a stroll round the fruit garden, and spend a profitable half hour in a search for caterpillars."

One feature of his activity will strike many readers with favor. "In some places singing and piano playing with open windows are forbidden, and it is a common house regulation in large towns that pianos shall be closed punctually at ten o'clock in the evening."

With all the rest, the police look sharply after all sellers of food and medicine. A milkman, for instance, is driving rapidly along the street. A policeman halts him, and on the spot makes an inspection of his wares. If anything wrong is discovered, the cans are forthwith emptied into the gutter, and the whole affair is published in the newspapers. There is no respect of persons, and the rule is "prompt and thorough."

In the official columns of the newspapers notices like this are common:

"The preparation which is sold by Blank & Co., —— Street, Berlin—all names being given—as the 'Universal Cough Mixture,' consists of—here follows a list of the ingredients. The preparation is sold at 65 cents a bottle, but the real cost, with bottle, is 2 cents.'"

A police force like this must be "a terror to evildoers," but probably it would not be popular in this country.

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